



Class 7 3

Copyright No.\_\_\_\_

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.





## NORMA LANE

### BY S. N. COOK

Snowbird

Lost

Hagar

At the Turn of the Lane





NORMA

# Norma Lane

### The Daughter of an Elk

SAMUEL NEWTON COOK



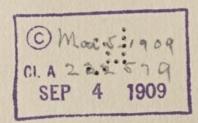
) ) ) ) ) ) ) ) )

Columbus, Ohio
Wayne-Cook Publishing Co.
1909

C1734

Copyright 1909, by S. N. Cook All rights reserved

The Pfeifer Press Columbus, O. 1909



To the members of Columbus Lodge No. 37, B. P. O. E. this volume is inscribed.

-The Author



## Norma Lane

### CHAPTER ONE.

AKE CITY has over 50,000 inhabitants. Its manufacturing interests are prosperous. Labor and Capital has worked for years without clash, and consequently, the Capital of Mohican County is a City of homes. A year previous to the events

to be narrated here, the City met with a loss. A man beloved by those who knew him, a man at the head of one of the largest manufacturing establishments had passed into the silence and the unknown. He had repeatedly been elected Mayor of the City, until he refused absolutely to run again, as his business interests and his failing health would not permit him to serve the people who so willingly and enthusiastically sought to honor him. When the hour finally came that Henry S. Lane was to be laid in the beautiful City of the Dead, beside the wife who had fallen asleep some ten years before, great mills shut down for a half day, the stores were closed and Lake City paused to wipe unshamed tears, because a man who lived not for himself alone was going away from them forever.

There were left to mourn him two daughters, Norma, a girl some 19 years of age, and Marion, a fair little human flower who was 16. Henry Lane left all his property to his daughters with the stipulation that his well loved and trusted

friend, Wilberton Vance, should control the estate until his youngest daughter was of age. Even though Norma should marry, the modest fortune should not be broken.

Lake City had long been planning for an Interurban Railway, and the time was near at hand when the City and the many villages lying to the East and South should realize their ambitions.

It was Wilberton Vance who was asked to lead in the enterprise. Vance was considered the richest man in Lake City. Perhaps there were others quite as well to do, but none were so free with their means where the public would be the beneficiary.

It was Vance who subscribed to the stock book first, and it was he who withdrew large amounts from paying investments to make the Lake City and South Eastern a possibility.

It was Wilberton Vance who secured the right of way and who, when it became known that the greater part of his fortune was invested in the enterprise, induced the farmers along the line of the proposed route to take stock.

Lake City was a fine market, and it needed but little persuasion to enlist the owners of rich farms in the project.

There was no steam road within many miles of the Interurban route and dull was he who could not see how much advantage the road would be to each one living on or near the line.

It was not only convenient for passengers to reach the city, but as a local freight route it promised wonders. Thus it was that persons interested in the road were content and happy; thus it was that no cloud was seen in the financial sky of Lake City, no sign of disaster to the Lake City & South Eastern Interurban Line until Dr. Harley called at Vance's office quite early one June morning.

The doctor had no stock in the road, but he considered that his misfortune. Not even Wilberton Vance was more

enthusiastic over the possibilities of the enterprise. Then, the route was through his old home town—Eden.

The city folk were wont to exclaim: "What a sleepy little village," but sleepy or not there was peace and content there. No one was rich, no one was poor. The sting of poverty was never felt in the village of Eden.

The doctor had accompanied Mr. Vance when that enterprising gentleman visited Eden and the farmers thereabouts, and as everyone knew the doctor—for years the village oracle—he held the attention of his old friends and neighbors when he said: "Gentlemen, Mr. Vance is here to offer you gold dollars for dimes."

It was only in Lake City that he was known as Dr. Harley. In Eden it was Dr. John, and Dr. John grew poorer with the years. While the good people of the village were able to pay for his services, he rarely presented a bill. So long as he made a living he could not bring himself to present a bill, until after he left the village and opened an office in the city.

He had been induced by an impecunious and plausible friend to purchase a worthless tract of land in an adjoining State. The only crop that seemed to be certain was the taxes, and these he neglected for a time until he received notice that his land was about to be sold that the County should have its "pound of flesh."

Incidentally the doctor mentioned the fact to Wilberton Vance. "Let me see your deed," said that gentleman; and when the document was examined, Vance urged him to pay the taxes, and not sacrifice the place he had paid for, and which he could ill afford to purchase and, perhaps, as illy afford to lose.

"Really, Mr. Vance, I have no money to spare just now. If I could collect half that is owing me I could do it easily, but it is hard work getting money now."

"By the way, Doctor, I do not recollect that you presented your bill for attendance upon Marion Lane, during her long illness. You was with the child night and day."

"Friend Vance, did you ever do anything in your life just because you wanted to, and never dreamed of getting money for doing it?"

"I have, doubtless, but this is different. Henry S. Lane left considerable for his children. All that he had he placed in my hands. That, doctor, is the most sacred trust that has ever come to me. All his life he was my friend, and when he died he gave his girls into my keeping."

"I know,—I was there,—I was at the bedside," the doctor replied.

"I remember now, you was there. Perhaps, you knew him well enough to know that he would want that just bill paid. If you knew him as I knew him, you would realize, that if he could communicate with me he would say: 'Vance, my friend and brother, is all the property I left my daughters exhausted that little Marion's doctor bills should go unpaid? Why should my daughter appear in the light of a pauper?'"

"How would anybody know it unless we told it? Vance, you've been my friend, you are my friend, or by God, man I wouldn't sit here and swallow that when I want to make the air blue — sulphurously blue — at the very thought of presenting a bill. When I nursed her back to life, with her sweet smile, a smile of infinite trust — I was paid, Vance — doubly paid."

"No, you were not. Your generous heart may say so, but we cannot let it go at that. I know you did more than any other physician could have done to save the life of that girl. You did it and you should be paid for it. Seriously, doctor, make out your bill and I'll pay you."

The angry light flashing from the keen gray eyes died away, and the tears came instead.

"All right," he said softly; "all right, Vance, let me sit at your desk a moment and I'll make it out."

Vance was puzzled over the bill the doctor handed him a few moments later, and coldly asked:

"What do you mean, doctor?"

"Just what it says there."

"For six weeks' attendance upon Marion Lane," read Vance, "three hundred dollars. Rec'd payment before she was born. Paid in full.

"JNO. P. HARLEY."

There was a deep, red scar upon the Doctor's left cheek, and this scar became almost purple when he was excited or angry. Wilberton Vance had heard of the sign of the purple — as some called it — others knew it as the danger signal.

"Tell me about it," and Vance's voice was all tenderness.

"Did you ever talk to Lane about his father?"

"I believe he scarcely knew his father. He was killed in the war, as I recollect."

"You are right."

"Gettysburg, was it not?"

"No, I got this beauty spot at Gettysburg. He got his honorable discharge at Cold Harbor. If angels ever had any business on a battlefield they were needed to escort the soul of Elisha Lane, straight up to the Courts of Light."

"You knew him then?"

"He was my Captain; I was his orderly Sergeant."

"I begin to understand."

"No, you will never understand. You may think you do, but you can't. You never fell from your horse, as the blood spurted in a hot, red stream from what you thought a death wound. I remember it as though it was but yesterday. I had said to myself: 'Well, John, this is the end; Mother is gone, and there is no one to fret. What more should a soldier hope for than to die on the field of battle.' I could hear the shouts

of the enemy. They were coming, and I expected their horses to trample me into the earth. Then I heard a voice that I knew, saying: 'John, are you living — are you much hurt?'

"'I guess I ain't quite done for yet, Captain,' I answered as best I could.

"Then that man dismounted, gathered me up in his arms, put me on his horse, and held me while he rode like hell, and the enemy all about us, crying: 'Surrender, Surrender,'

"That was the grandfather of the little girl I pulled through that sickness. Say, Vance, you've got good red blood in you, would you have me render the bill differently?"

"Doctor," there was reverence in voice and look, "Doctor Harley, I have sat by and heard men utter alleged funny remarks about that scar of yours, but they won't do it any more. That is all—they won't do it any more in my presence."

"Vance, you would make a devil of a fine Colonel of Cavalry if there was such a war now as there was then; but there can never be such a war again."

Vance had seen the battle light in those gray eyes, but the mist was flooding them now.

All this happened some months before the morning Doctor Harley called at Vance's office with news concerning Cyrus Flood. The doctor had visited a country patient who lived upon the proposed trolley line. Abraham Thomas was one of the stockholders of the road and he had given the right of way through his farm. One of his children was ill and the doctor had been sent for. The physician who ministers to country folk rarely writes prescriptions. He has his modest little drug store with him and gives careful directions how the medicine should be taken.

It was the doctor's custom to leave the family most hopeful, unless the case was very serious, and so on this occasion the anxious parents were smiling when he turned from the bed where the sufferer lay, for he had promised that the boy would soon be helping his father on the farm. "When the wheat is ready to cut Tom will be right there in the field the best man on the job."

The farmer followed the doctor to the gate, and each paused a moment when Thomas said : "Doctor, have you heard that there is trouble brewing for our new road?"

"I never heard of it. I saw Vance a day or two ago and he was never more enthusiastic. He said they were almost ready for the rails. Next week they begin placing the poles for the wires."

"I've been told that Vance is about at the end of his string, and that he can't git the money to complete the road," persisted Thomas.

"Abe," began the doctor impressively, "you are a Christian and believe the Bible?"

"Certainly."

"You have heard that Ananias and Sapphira are both dead—stone dead, years ago?"

"Certainly."

"Well, how did they get back? Of course, there have been a number of able liars since, and you surely found one of them. Tell me, what did you hear?"

"There was a man here the other day, Doc John, a spruce lookin' chap. I was settin' on the porch along in the afternoon, and this fellow druv up an' sez to me, sez he, 'Is this Mr. Abraham Thomas?' I reckoned it was, and sez he, 'I want to talk to you a bit.' 'Won't you come in?' sez I, and he hitched an' come in. Then he told me that his name was Flood, and that he lived in New York, and that he represented a company that was intending to furnish certain equip-

ments, or something of that kind, but when he got here he found things mighty shaky."

"Oh, he did, did he?" snapped the doctor; "one don't often find those New York people so accommodating. It was surely good of him to hire a livery rig and come away out here to tell you to be careful of a man you have known for years — a man as square as the Good Lord ever makes them — and who has his own fortune in this road."

"He said he learned I was a stockholder, and that I had better look out."

"He did, did he? I wish I had been here."

"I'm sort of glad you wasn't, Doc, because when you git started you swear mightily. Something started you one day out here an' little Sara Ann must a heard you. She was out under the cherry tree, a tryin' to make her doll stand on its head. I thought at first that the little one was prayin' 'till I got up close to her, an' then I knowed she had heard you when you was warmed up over something."

"What did you do then, Abe?"

"I cut an apple switch right there."

"Never do it again, Abe. If your young one ever swears because she heard me, come to town with your apple sprout and wear it out on me—that is, if you tell me first what the child said. You see I know my swear words when I meet them, an' I wouldn't stand hitched for some other fellow's language. I'm trying to break myself of swearing—it's a mean habit. I never was with the army in Flanders, like 'Uncle Toby,' but I was in the army off there in Virginia, and they surely cussed a few there occasionally."

"I s'pose they did. I knowed your folks pretty well, Doc John, but I don't recall as I remember your Uncle Toby."

"No, he did not live around here," and the doctor drove away chuckling to himself. Abraham Thomas had never heard of "Tristram Shandy."

#### CHAPTER TWO.

HE building in which Wilberton Vance had his office had once been a family residence, in fact it was the old Vance home, as it was known, but it was down town surrounded by business establishments. When Mr. Vance moved into his new

residence, "Vance Villa," as his daughter Jean was pleased to call it, he turned the spacious dwelling into an office building.

From the South windows was a charming view of lake, farm and woodland. The Casino on the lake shore was within view also. When the new road should be completed they who sat by these windows could see the car sweep around the curve of the lake until lost to sight behind towering hills. There was also a lawn carefully kept, where a half hundred rose bushes bloomed throughout the summer.

Amid such surroundings it was not strange that every available room was quickly secured by gentlemen willing to pay liberally for offices where odors of summer blooms were wafted by the soft South winds.

It was not strange, either, that Jean, Wilberton Vance's only daughter, found it pleasant to visit her father's splendidly equipped offices. It was quite natural, too, that Harold Brady, a dashing young fellow, the main stay of the *Evening Telegram*, should seek numerous interviews with Wilberton Vance, concerning that most interesting theme, the Interurban Railway.

The careful observer, however, might have noted that these professional calls were so timed—at least never

omitted — when Jean had an hour or two to spend in her father's office.

Much as he dreaded her sarcasm, and stinging retorts, Brady never failed to be with her when possible. Once when describing a social event, Harold alluded to Jean Vance as a "Daughter of the Gods." She was inclined to smile at her friend's effusiveness until Emily Blain, a young woman Jean always considered "perfectly horrid," asked her with most gracious sarcasm how the "Gods" were getting along, and whether ordinary mortals were expected to speak to her as she passed by. When next Jean and Harold met, the occasion was particularly interesting to Mr. Brady. The stage setting of this comedy was in Vance's office.

"Good morning, Miss Vance," said Harold breezily. There was no reply. The young woman stared at him as if he was an inanimate object that excited her curiosity. A dash of red swept over his face as he repeated: "Good morning, Miss Vance."

"Papa," she said, "this young person is a Mr. Brady, a newspaper reporter."

"What does all this mean, daughter? I'm sure I know Mr. Brady very well, not only as a newspaper man, but as the Esquire of our lodge."

A ghost of a smile flitted about the lips of the father, for he knew that this fair, wilful, and unusually handsome girl was punishing her devoted admirer for some cause.

"I did not suppose," she remarked with lofty disdain, "that a common reporter on a most common place newspaper, was permitted to associate with one of the Immortal Gods."

"If you and Harold have any quarreling to do, kindly retire to the lawn among the roses and fight it out, I'm busy," replied Vance.

"Is there anything new this morning, Mr. Vance?" asked the reporter.

"Nothing worth while this morning."

Jean had turned her back upon them, pretending she did not care that there was such a person as Harold Brady on earth.

"What has happened?" the young man asked. His manner was rather sharp and commanding.

"I wish you to understand, Mr. Brady, that I am the daughter of Wilberton Vance. I am quite content to be his daughter, and if that powerful engine for the dissemination of patent medicine advertisements, the *Evening Telegram*, has occasion to mention my name again, I prefer it should be as the daughter of a gentleman."

"What in the world is 'biting' you, Jean?"

"'Biting me' — an elegant expression, Mr. Brady."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Vance."

"A clod"—she was about to say a clodhopper would have a better manner of expressing himself, but Brady interrupted: "'A clod—the sluggish clod the rude swain turns with his share and treads upon."

"Mr. Brady," Jean replied severely, "you have about as much good, steady common sense as a moth — a poor, white fluttering moth."

"I am all that," he answered tragically, 'a moth that burns its life out in the great white light — you are the light — behold, the 'moth and the flame."

"Oh! you simpleton. I think you would dread to meet the Probate Judge for fear he would send you to the Lunatic—"

"You have no license to speak of Probate Judges," he broke in.

She paused a moment to grasp his meaning and then with a half hysterical laugh exclaimed:

"Oh, you indescribable idiot." Then turning to Marion Lane, whose fingers were flying over the keys of the type-writer, asked: "Marion, did you notice that gray waist Mrs.

Moler wore yesterday at Church? It seemed as if she was poured into it."

"Before Marion could reply Brady interrupted: "It reminded me of the Atlantic."

"Will you subside? You don't know what you are talking about."

"I do," he answered with great earnestness: "'And poured round all

"'Old Ocean's gray and melancholy waste-""

Then he executed a masterly and sudden retreat from the office while Vance laughed heartily.

"I wouldn't laugh at that foolish fellow, papa" — but she did, and going to the door her eyes followed him far down the street.

It was on the fifteenth of June, one week later, that Wilberton Vance first met Cyrus Flood. It was the next day after Doctor Harley had the talk with the farmer as mentioned in the preceding chapter. Margery Patton, the scrub woman, was usually the first to arrive and put the office in order, but this morning Jimmie Rimple, the office boy, came with the mail before the doors were unlocked.

"Where is that Margery this morning?" It mattered not that there was no one to answer, and Jimmie seated himself upon the top step of the short flight that led from the flagstone pavement and proceeded to look over the mail. "Ah! here is one for Miss Jean from Darby Center. Where the thunder is Darby Center? I suppose it's none of my business, though."

Jimmie was so interested in examining the post marks that he did not observe that Margery Patton was waiting to unlock the door and that he was in her way.

"I 'spose you got your own mail sorted out by this time."

Margery's voice was hoarse and her nose more lurid than usual, which was an unfailing sign that she had one of

"them breakin' down spells," as she put it. Some of Margery's neighbors were unkind enough to say that the scrub woman had taken an overdose of her remedy for such spells. She found it more convenient to have her prescriptions filled at O'Brian's Cafe, as the proprietor was pleased to name his saloon, than at the drug store near by.

"Where have you been this forenoon, Margery?"

"None of your business. When did you get to be the boss?" Margery's hand was a bit unsteady as she fumbled with the key.

"When I do get to be boss," and Jimmie's manner was quite severe, "I'll bet you will arrive on time."

Jimmie placed the letters on Mr. Vance's desk and seated himself at the machine, idly drumming upon the keys.

"Why don't you git around here and do something yourself, you lazy thing," said Margery. "At least you could open the windows."

"I don't draw a salary for doing woman's work."

"Oh, you don't, hey? I 'spose if you didn't draw a salary for a couple weeks they'd notice it in the banks. I hear they have panics in Wall Street, New York, an' like enough it's 'cause you fail to git your salary in circulation quick enough."

Then Margery sat down to laugh at Jimmie's discomfiture. She had touched a sore spot. Jimmie received \$1.50 per week, and as he had arranged—in his mind—to marry Marion Lane, he realized that this was a beggarly sum to begin housekeeping upon. Jimmie was 11 and Marion 16, and naturally the stenographer regarded Jimmie as a little boy.

The lad was speechless for a few moments after Margery's thrust, but remembering some lines Harold Brady extemporized one day, he began to sing:

"Margery, Margery, scrub away,
What you don't do now, you'll do some day."

This started the scrub woman from her chair and taking after the boy with the broom, chased him about the office.

As Jimmie dodged behind the desks to escape the broom, Marion Lane appeared, and pausing at the door a moment became mistress of the situation at once when she announced what would happen when she told Neil about the affair.

Marion had left some work unfinished the night before and came early that she might complete it before Mr. Vance's arrival. The type-machine was clicking merrily and Jimmie stood close beside her, putting his arm about her affectionately.

"Look at that fool boy," Margery muttered. "Break away there," she cried.

Jimmie jumped as if some one had shot at him, and taking a worn base ball from his pocket, threw it viciously at the scrub woman. When Jimmie was a baby his fond mother was wont to sing to him:

"Jimmie Rimple
Has a dimple
In his little chin—"

Some of the lad's schoolmates, recalling the mother song, made life a burden by repeating the lines. Margery had managed to dodge the ball, and while Jimmie was looking for it, began to croon wierdly:

"Jimmie Rimple
Has a dimple
In his little chin—"

"You old poll parrot," shrieked the boy, taking after her, "I'll murder you."

"Here, what does this mean?" The confusion subsided at once. The new arrival was Neil Dare, Mr. Vance's confidential man, whose word was law in the office when Vance was absent.

"Margery, finish your work; you should have had it done long before this," said Neil as he took his seat at the desk. Presently Marion joined him. "I want to ask you, Neil, if ladies are ever permitted to attend your social sessions? I understand you are to have a session or supper or something tomorrow evening and Norma and I wish to bring something, even if we stay but a few minutes."

"It was intended as a stag affair," Neil replied, "but we'll see Mr. Vance and arrange the matter all right, I imagine. Brady and I are on the Committee — but what is up with you girls?"

"We have a little surprise for you." Just then the voice of the doctor was heard outside, crying: "Git out, you condemned, ugly mouthed dog."

Very gently Marion said: "Neil, go and get 'Teddy;' he might bite the doctor, you know."

Neil soon had his English bull terrier by the collar, and he and the doctor came in arm in arm.

"I'm sometimes tempted to kill that son — of perdition," said the doctor as he glanced about and saw Marion at her writing desk.

Doubtless the quick nudge Neil gave him was efficatious. "You come purty near swearin', didn't you, Doc?" asked

Margery drowsily.

Marion frowned, and Neil turned upon the woman angrily: "Margery, have you finished dusting?"

"Yes, why?"

"You may go, if you are through."

The woman slowly arose, getting her broom and dust pan, and pausing a moment near the street door, returned and dropped listlessly into an office chair.

"I want to see Mr. Vance this morning," said the doctor, and I've something to say to you when we are alone."

"You may go for the mail, Jim," said Neil, sharply.

"I brought the mail," the lad replied.

"So you have — then see if you can find Mr. Vance. Tell him he is wanted."

"Where will I look for him?"

"If I knew I wouldn't tell you to go and find him."

Jimmie preferred to remain. He, boy like, was desirous of hearing what the doctor might have to say. The same was true of Margery. Neil observed that she was yet in the office, not even making a pretense of work.

"You may go, Margery," he said, quietly.

"Much obliged."

"Don't let me have to ask you again."

"You have no feelin' for a poor workin' woman at all— I don't care if I never come back."

Jimmie returned long enough to sing a line or two of the rag time melody: "I don't care if you never came back."

Jimmie's melody was mingled with Margery's brief recitation: "Jimmie Rimple, had a dimple, etc."

"I was about to say, Neil," began the doctor when Marion came forward with the smile that the doctor felt was indescribable and said: "Excuse me, gentlemen, but may I go home for a little while? I wish to tell Norma what you said about tomorrow evening."

"Certainly you may go, but I do not know how soon Mr. Vance may need you," Neil replied.

"I shall not be long gone," and the eyes of the man who had fought death for weeks and triumphed followed her until she was out of sight. Then he turned to the young man, saying: "Do you know, Neil, that there is a stranger in the City by the name of Flood who has been paying considerable attention to Norma, lately?"

"No, doctor, I — I never heard of him. Are you certain that he knows Norma?"

"I have seen them together?"

"Where?"

"At the Casino."

"And she never told me." The whole demeanor of the young man changed. His face grew haggard. The lines about his firm mouth deepened. His strong frame seemed to tremble and grow weak. The news he had received left a wound that smarted and burned. So much for love. Neil Dare loved beautiful Norma Lane. It was the boast of Lake City that its daughters had more than their share of beauty, and whether a blessing or a curse, nature made these fair girls the peers of princesses or queens. None of all these human buds were fairer than Norma Lane.

When Neil told her how he loved her — told her how every plan and every ambition of his life was woven about her, she did not say him nay. She bade him wait. "We are young yet," she said, "and are not ready, Neil."

"No, not yet, but when this road is done Mr. Vance has promised me a chance—and I shall work—Oh, Norma, I'll work, work, work for you my beautiful one."

And so he was waiting as she had asked, and a stranger had come between them.

"What is he doing here?" Neil asked finally.

"I am coming to that," replied the doctor, and the scar on his face began to show the danger signal. "I found out yesterday that he is here to break down Vance's credit. He is here to ruin the railway. He is here to excite the farmers against Vance, and I came this morning to see Wilberton, and warn him against this fellow."

"Could you be mistaken, Doctor, about him being with Norma?"

"I could not be mistaken — it was last night — why should I tell you a lie? I have not been blind in regard to your affection for Norma. I've rejoiced in it, Neil, for I regard you as an honorable, safe young man, to whom a young woman may give her priceless love."

"Doctor, I love her so much I am a pitiful coward in her presence. I sometimes tremble for fear some foolish word may turn her against me, but you cannot understand that."

"I can't, hey?" snapped the doctor. "May I ask you why?"

"Oh, Doctor, you are a professional man — you are a surgeon — you can cut and saw a human being — a woman, a girl, even my beautiful Norma — or little Marion, as a butcher prepares—"

"Stop, Neil, or old as I am I'll assault you. Little Marion, you say. Why, boy, I'd hack myself to pieces inch by inch before I'd draw one drop of blood from her precious veins." Then, lifting his face toward heaven as though in the presence of the Infinite, he cried: "Great God Almighty, hear the boy. I'd cut and saw my little Marion, he says — she that was going from my arms to Yours, but I clung to her, I clung to her and saved her for her friends and for myself."

"Why, Doctor Harley," and Neil stood awed in the presence of the veteran, "Doctor, do you love Marion?"

"Did ever a mother love her babe nestling in her bosom?"
You are old enough to be her father."

"Yes, yes, I know. The years come on and leave us wrinkled and gray, but there is something that never grows old. Lovers have fondly and foolishly said: 'I hold her image in my heart.' They don't. The heart is simply a machine — an engine that keeps pumping, pumping on until it wears out and then they put us away. That which keeps the image of some woman enshrined as a thing that is sacred, grows wrinkled never."

"Does Marion know that you love her in that manner?"
"I should say not. My indifferent, and often austere manner toward her would prevent any such imagination on her part."

The hard lines faded, Neil Dare, even in the midst of his panic over the unwelcome news the doctor brought, was forced to laugh. "Your austere manner is good, Doctor. You are as austere as that mother you mentioned a moment ago whose babe was nestling on her bosom."

"I've always hoped she would never suspicion my feelings toward her. I would have her think that it was simply her old physician who fought grim death as I fought the enemy on the field of battle. Marion was fourteen then and I sat by her side night after night or walked the floor carrying her in my arms as tho' she were a babe. If there were no other reasons, and there are — Wilberton Vance knows the one great reason — I would help you fight that scoundrel Flood for Marion's sake."

"We will stand together, Doctor."

"That we will, but don't hint to Marion that I care for her. I've got to go now, but I'll be back. I must see Vance."

When the Doctor's retreating footsteps had died away Neil threw himself upon his open desk and fought back the tears.

"If Norma was dying," he thought, surely he would have the right to weep, and this was as bitter as death. The thoughtless laugh at the grief of a lover, yet what anguish is more keen than the passing of a loved one to the arms of another? Norma Lane had enthralled the soul of this strong-limbed, strong-hearted young man. She was the central figure in his every-day dream. In fancy he was building a home for her, and in the open door she stood ever waiting for him. Love paints such wonderful pictures. His haggard face was buried in his arms, and a sigh that was almost a sob escaped him as Marion came noiselessly into the office.

"Neil, my brother, are you ill?"

Like a sword thrust were these words—"my brother." This brotherless little one loved Neil as she might have loved a brother as gentle and affectionate as Neil had been to her.

Slowly he lifted his head, and she saw that grief had changed him while she was gone that short time. "May I go for the doctor, Neil?"

"The doctor cannot help me."

"Can you tell me your trouble?" she asked, her voice trembling.

"It concerns Norma — do you know anything — do you know that some one has come between us?"

"I have been afraid that something was going to happen. The other evening I was talking about you, and Norma turned upon me petulantly, saying: "There are other gentlemen in the world worth considering."

"But there is none like Neil," I said.

"You will soon be old enough to comfort him." She laughed heartlessly, I thought, as she went to her room and shut the door in my face.

"Dear little loyal sister," he said sadly, "how often I have fancied us walking home together from the office, and Norma standing waiting for us. In this picture was our little home — Norma's and mine, and you were with us, my own little sister. Oh, Marion, Marion, must that picture fade?"

"No, it shall not. Neil, don't give her up; don't let any one come between you. Will you tell me what you have heard?"

"Yes, I'll tell you. The doctor told me while you were gone. A stranger has been in the City for some days. He met Norma, and they have been seen together at the Casino."

"Neil, Neil, don't let him steal her from you — fight him, fight him — Oh, my good, kind brother——" She sank upon her knees beside him sobbing piteously.

So absorbed were they that they did not observe that someone was standing in the door looking at them.

"Quite a little melodrama this," said the stranger to himself. Then he coughed slightly to attract attention and, as Neil and Marion arose, asked quietly if he could meet Mr. Vance.

"He may be here any moment, but he has not yet put in an appearance this morning," replied Neil, calmly and without sign of embarrassment.

"Thank you, I will return later. Please say to him that I have a business proposition to present. My card — good morning."

Neil stood staring at the bit of pasteboard. Cyrus Flood was leaving the office.

### CHAPTER THREE.



HAT is the man Norma has been meeting," said Neil.

"I cannot understand it," replied Marion.

"It seems to me now that I should have taken him by the throat and strangled him."

"No, Neil, that would have made matters worse — believe me, it will come out all right. Perhaps tomorrow evening you will have an opportunity to talk to her, that is, if we can come."

"You say you have a surprise for us?"

"It is not much, and I will tell you about it. Norma and I have been talking about it since we heard you were to have a banquet, or whatever it is. You know how good you all were to papa when he was sick so long, and how beautiful were the flowers you sent, when he died.

"Now Norma and I wish to decorate your tables. We can send them if we must, but we hoped we might come before the time to dine and arrange them ourselves."

"That is all right; we can manage it, Marion. Little sister, I was looking forward to a jolly time tomorrow night, but now there is no joy in sight — it is all gloom."

"The sun will shine again, brother dear," said Marion softly.

Just then they heard a rush of footsteps, and Harold Brady followed Jean Vance into the office.

"You didn't beat me more than a second," he said.

"I was not aware that we were racing," she answered indifferently. "Where is papa, Neil?"

"He has not been here this morning?"

"Late, is he not?"

"Later than usual, yes."

"You were almost two squares ahead of me when I started," Harold interrupted.

"What was the occasion for this rush, young man?"

"You have heard of that new story, have you not, 'The Magnet?'"

"Ah? A magnet draws steel, I know. I was not aware it had the same effect upon brass."

"Stung!" exclaimed Harold with melodramatic air.

"If you are badly hurt, I'll give you this; its odor may revive you;" and Jean gave him a rose.

"I brought these for you, Marion, but we'll spare one to the poor boy that has been 'stung' as he puts it."

"Ah, one rose,

One rose, but one by those fair fingers cull'd, Were worth a hundred kisses press'd on lips Less exquisite than thine.'"

"Harold Brady, give that rose back to me — you do not deserve even common politeness," and Jean's frown was really threatening.

"Don't you remember, Jean, 'The Gardner's Daughter?' I read it to you once. You said you loved Tennyson, and I thought that I might fall heir to that affection, now that the good poet is gone."

"Don't be silly, Harold," she snapped.

Never mind, the incident is closed," he replied.

"A man was here asking for Mr. Vance a short time before you came. Here is his card; I anticipate we shall hear more of him ere long. Dr. Harley informs me that he has been here a week or ten days, perhaps longer. I may be prejudiced, in fact, I think I am, but the sooner he leaves Lake City the better it will be for several of us."

"What is the matter Neil? You are looking wonderfully glum this morning," said Jean.

"If what I fear is true, you will know all about it soon enough. You will doubtless meet him, Harold, and I beg of you to keep as close watch upon him as you can." Neil then turned to Marion, who in reply to his softly uttered request began putting together certain papers upon her desk.

"If you are intending to remain awhile, Miss Jean, Marion and I will go over some reports in the private office."

"Very well, run along, Mr. Brady, and I will take care of the office. Don't sit there looking silly at me, young man," she said, turning upon Harold suddenly.

"Shall I go out and get a false face?"

"It might make some improveemnt," she remarked indifferently.

"Honestly, Jean," and with all his lightness and banter Harold Brady was deeply in earnest as he answered: "Honestly, Jean, I wish you wouldn't 'roast' me all the time."

"You might as well get used to it."

"I presume you would make it pretty warm for me at times, but I am willing to chance it. Jean, if you would only try to care even the least little—"

"Harold Brady, you used to be a bright, sensible, young man, but you are getting to be positively foolish."

"There it comes again, a regular avalanche of reproach. When I first knew you, Jean, you were kind, gentle and sweet."

"My sweetness, I suppose, has palled upon your fastidious taste, sir."

"Nothing of the kind, and well you know it." There was an earnestness and dignity in his reply that made her realize that the moment had arrived when sarcasm would not do if she cared to consider Harold Brady a friend.

They had been friends — jolly companions — and now he was showing lover-like attentions. Even though these attentions were not displeasing, it was somewhat of a shock. Their association with each other had been so jolly, so much like two inseparable chums, that when he changed from chum to lover, she put herself on the defensive.

"Harold," she said, as her expressive and beautiful eyes looked fearlessly into his, "what if I should do as some girls are foolish enough to — take your arm on every possible occasion and cling to you with an affectation of childish fondness — in other words, a clinging sort of a girl — how long would you regard me with tolerance? You would sicken of me as men sicken of such girls the world over."

"That may be, but if I received from you even a shadow of affection my heart would dance—"

"Don't encourage your heart to dance, Harold," she interrupted. "That might lead to serious consequences and you may have occasion to call Dr. Harley."

"I should call Doctor Jean Vance."

"Hush, there is papa," she said warningly.

The gentleman who came breezily and smartly into the office was a tall, fine looking specimen of manhood, about 45 years of age. Women were wont to say he was handsome, and men were willing to concede that he was a manly man. Jean, who might readily be forgiven for her partiality, believed him peerless among men. There was a tint of the ripening chestnut in his abundant hair — a tint that made her own tresses her crown of glory.

"Papa, dear, you are late."

"I have been busy this morning — it seems to me I have a new office force—where is Neil?"

"He and Marion are in the private office.

"What can I do for you, Harold?"

"I dropped in to see if there was anything new concerning the road."

Jean was looking steadily at the young man and his eyes fell guiltily.

"Ananias," she murmured.

"What did you say, Jean?" asked her father.

"I was talking to myself, I think."

"A habit that should not be encouraged in company. It sounded to me as if you had mentioned the name of Ananias."

"Papa, do you suppose that gentleman with the unpleasant reputation for veracity was ever a newspaper man?"

"He probably possessed some of the qualifications," Mr. Vance replied as he began opening his mail.

"And Mrs. Ananias, although I believe she was not known by that name — it was probably Sophrona——"

"What a rare Bible scholar," interrupted Jean.

"I may be wrong about the name, but I am of the opinion that she might have done well as a society reporter," Harold answered.

"Were you discussing the Old Testament when I arrived?"

"No, except the unequaled value of the Golden Rule, as a precept."

"Very true, Harold, very true," replied Mr. Vance. 'And the faults of our brothers, we should write,' etc. And by the way, you are on the Committee for the Social tomorrow evening. Have you got things going all right?"

"Everything is in apple pie order — except the apple pie."

"Have you selected the toastmaster?"

"We have."

"Judge Hardy, I presume."

"No. I have the honor of addressing him."

"You are the honored one, papa. What do you have to do?"

"If I am expected to perform that function, I shall have little to do except look wise and call on others to do the entertaining."

Vance, while running over his letters, found the missive from Darby Junction and handed it to his daughter.

"Papa," said Jean, when she had hastily read it. This letter has been a long time coming. Listen to this, but I'll not bother you reading it. You may be interested in knowing, however, that Eleanor Clay is coming."

"Yes," he answered absently.

"She is a very sweet girl, papa."

"Indeed?"

"You are quite indifferent now, but I would not be surprised if you make love to her before the week is out."

"Do you often get those foolish spells, daughter?"

"Widowers are quite human, my dear dad, but I won't scold if you like her — oh, well — just a little."

"You are very kind, I'm sure."

"And may I worship at the new shrine also?"

"Mr. Brady, you may accompany me to the train at once, that is, if the train is not already in. Eleanor is a dear, good girl, and she would not put up with your nonsense for a minute."

Jean went to the window that looked out upon the street — the street that led from the depot. "Who is that, do you suppose? Papa, there comes Eleanor, and a queerly dressed woman with her. I know now, it is her old maid Aunt, but Eleanor did not write me that she was coming. There is the doctor with them, and his arms full of bandboxes and satchels."

Then Jean heard a shrill voice exclaim: "Is this where we are going to put up, Eleanor?"

It may be well to learn how it came that Dr. Harley officiated as escort or porter as he felt himself to be. The Doctor had gone from Vance's office to the depot to meet the Eastern Express, believing there might be men of his acquaintance on board having business at the county seat, and some of these be interested in the Interurban Railway. As it happened there were none upon the train, and the Doctor lounging easily upon a freight truck presented an unlikely appearance, at least unlike a professional gentleman of his standing. The Doctor was rather careless in dress. He wore his hair long, as was common in the war days, and he was ever loth to follow prevailing customs. His slouch hat was a bit disreputable; his long and well worn Prince Albert coat was buttoned carelessly. He stood erect and removed his hat with deference when approached by a middle aged woman, and a young lady of engaging appearance.

He had heard the young woman say: "I am sure Jean would have, met us had she received my letter."

"Well, mebby this man might know something about them," replied the elderly lady. "How de do, sir," she said as the Doctor lifted his hat and shook back his iron gray mane. "Do you happen to know a man by the name of Wilberton Vance?"

"I know him, Madame. His residence is quite a distance from here, but his office is near by and I'll be pleased to direct you."

"I wish you would, we'll pay you for it."

"Thank you," replied the Doctor, coldly.

"We will regard it as a great favor if you will," the young woman said, believing that her companion was mistaken about the man they supposed to be an ordinary depot lounger willing to carry baggage for a small sum.

With enthusiasm born of friendship that had not ceased when the girls left the Seminary, where they had been associates and companions, they were soon in each others arms. Stiff and erect stood the old maid, as she proved to be, until Mr. Vance came forward and asked her to be seated, saying: "The young ladies will remember presentely that there are those who are not so well acquainted as they."

In the meantime the Doctor had deposited his burden and was about to turn away when the woman abruptly asked: "How much do we owe you?"

"Don't mention it, please." There was a resenting flash in his eyes, for he had observed that Marion had buried her face in her handkerchief to smother a peal of laughter.

"Take the money," said the old maid ostentatiously opening her purse, "I'm not broke. You look as if you needed it, goodness knows. Here is a dime — take it and git a hair cut. What do you think, Eleanor, this man won't take a cent."

"Never mind, Aunt, we are under all the greater obligation. "Jean," she continued, "this is my Aunt Louise Clay, my father's sister—"

"His old maid sister, why don't you say. And so this is Jean I've heard Eleanor talk so much about. Well, Jean, I jist made up my mind at the last minute that I'd come. Eleanor didn't invite me. I invited myself, and that is why she didn't write to you about me comin' along. I said to Eleanor, I wonder, said I, if that girl friend of yours would turn your old Aunt out in the cow pasture if she dropped in on you also, for a few days. I was just dying to go somewhere, for I've saved up three dollars and fifty cents a week — butter and egg money — for the last four months, and as the boys say, I feel like blowin' some of it."

"You are most welcome," laughed Jean. "And I hope the Doctor will see that you do not get lonesome."

"The Doctor! What Doctor?"

"Our good friend, Dr. Harley, who escorted you here.

Doctor, permit me to introduce Miss Eleanor Clay and her Aunt, Miss Louise Clay."

The doctor bowed with great deference to Miss Eleanor, while his greeting to the old maid was less gracious.

"Land sakes — that man a doctor. If he don't look for all the world like——"

"Please, Aunt, do not be rude, it is unlike you to be unkind," and Eleanor looked distressed.

"Unkind? No. Didn't I offer to pay him? Say, Doctor, I'll apologize. I would't hurt your feelings for a two dollar bill. How do do, anyway? You'll excuse me, but I've seen some funny looking doctors in my day, but you march in a squad all by yourself."

Eleanor knew how useless it was to attempt to stop her aunt when she got started, and began conversation with Jean more loudly than her wont, reminding her friend that she had never been presented to Mr. Vance. When Eleanor and Mr. Vance looked into each others eyes the young woman blushed as she saw in the brown depths admiration. When she recovered from the confusion Jean was quick to observe, she said: "I had no idea, Jean, your papa was so young, so splendid." Mr. Vance turned to speak to Aunt Louise, who when she had expressed herself to freely concerning the personal appearance of the doctor, began to realize that she had been impolite if not impudent and had caused her niece no little embarrassment.

Wilberton Vance introduced himself to Aunt Louise, as Jean was presenting Eleanor to Marion, Neil and Harold. Harold made no attempt to be gallant or witty and was awarded by an approving smile that left him in a most satisfactory state of mind.

While Miss Louise Clay was fully ten years older than Wilberton Vance, she replied to his graceful and courteous greeting by saying: "An' so your Jean's papa, an' while you

must be about my age, or nearly so, I must confess you are dreadful young lookin'."

"I must believe, Miss Clay, that you are deliberately flattering me," he replied.

"No, I'm not. I've jist half a notion to set my cap for you myself."

"Remember, you are in great danger, Miss Clay. I warn you I am a most mercenary individual. I heard you tell how much you have saved this summer," Vance replied, laughingly.

"Oh, that's jist my loose change. I've something put away in the bank—" she began when Eleanor interposed and the voluble lady was hurriedly introduced to Marion and the young men.

"Vance," said the doctor, "while they have that descendant of Xantippe interested for a time in other people, I want to go over a matter of special interest to you."

"Very well, doctor, we will be alone presently. Jean will call a carriage and take her guests home."

Just then Norma Lane entered the office and seeing so many present was about to withdraw, as she murmured an apology. Neil started to join her, when Jean introduced Eleanor and they formed a group that caused a stranger, then entering the office, to pause, half embarrassed in the presence of these young women — each a distinct type of beauty.

Neil Dare was the only one present to note the embarrassment illy concealed when Norma turned to look upon the stranger. Vance was standing by his desk, his hand upon the shoulder of the doctor, as if detaining him, when the stranger presented his card as he said: "Have I the pleasure of meeting Mr. Vance?"

Vance took the proffered hand as he said: "Be seated, Mr. Flood, my friends will be leaving in a moment."

Dr. Harley closely observed Norma, as had Neil, and when the girl attempted to excuse herself and leave the office the doctor reached the door first and prevented her departure.

"Wait a few moments, Norma, I wish to see you; Jean

and her friends will be leaving soon," he said.

"I must return at once," she answered.

"I have noticed your manner since that fellow came in — what does it mean, Norma?"

"Do not, I pray; you attract the attention of everyone — you have no right to detain me."

"Neil, come here. This thing may as well be settled one time as another," the doctor commanded.

Fortunately Jean, who had been at the telephone, had not observed the drama that was being played. Neither had Mr. Vance, but the stranger — Flood — was alert to all that was transpiring.

"I have sent for a carriage and it will be here in a moment. Come with me and see the roses and leave the gentlemen to discuss business. Will you come with us, Norma, or do you wish to see Marion?" Marion caught the meaning of the doctor's quick signal, and called: "Norma, wait a moment. I want to see you about tomorrow evening."

Norma had hoped to get away by accepting Jean's invitation to join them in the side lawn, but when Marion called she could not leave without noticeable rudeness. In the meantime Vance had excused himself to Flood and accompanied the ladies to the side lawn. Flood attempted to appear at ease, although aware of the unfaltering gaze of the doctor upon him.

"Norma," said Neil, and there was rare tenderness in his tones—"Norma, why have you acted so strangely of late?" He paused, but she did not answer. "Have I unconsciously offended you?"

"No," she answered sullenly.

"Is he the cause of it?" and the young man pointed directly at Flood.

"Have some respect for me," she murmured, "if you have none for strangers or yourself."

Neil left his desk and placing himself in front of Flood, asked: "What is this young lady to you?"

"What business is it of yours?"

"I'm making it my business."

"I imagine as much," sneered Flood.

"I assume the right, as a friend," and Neil was looking into the shifting eyes of the man before him.

"I resent it, sir," said Flood finally.

"I demand that you shall answer me or I'll-"

Please, Neil, don't." At the sound of Marion's voice—at once an appeal and a warning that he must not forget himself—his threatening attitude changed. At that moment Mr. Vance returned, and Flood, turning to him, exclaimed: "I appeal to Mr. Vance for protection."

"You d— dod gasted coward," began the doctor. Marion understood his supreme effort to control himself, and understood as well that her presence alone prevented a scene of violence. She knew that the man who had carried her in his arms for hours had muscles of steel, and that even his years had not weakened them.

"What is the trouble here?" asked Vance in low tones, but there was thunder upon his brow.

"This young man has insulted me," said Flood.

"What is the meaning of this, Neil?"

"I am waiting for an answer."

"I'll tell you, Mr. Vance," and the doctor drew near Flood. Norma now had an opportunity to leave the office—her eyes were fixed upon the group in front of her—her face pale and her breath coming in quick gasps.

"I came here this morning to tell you about this man," continued the doctor. "You were not here, and now, face to face with him, I'll tell you. This man is here to try to ruin you."

"This person is mistaken, Mr. Vance," interrupted Flood.

"'The person,' as you put it, is not mistaken."

"Neil, did you threaten Mr. Flood because you had heard this story?" asked Vance.

"Let me answer that also," interrupted the doctor. was the tale bearer, that brought Neil unpleasant news as well as you. He loves the daughter of your dead friend and brother as you call him. I sat by the bedside of Henry Lane, when he was passing, as you well know. I heard him say to you, 'Vance, my brother, you will see that my little girls are kept safely when I am gone.' You know why I care deeply for Elisha Lane's grandchildren - why I am making this my affair as well as Neil's - you know it, Vance, you know it. This man is a stranger, we know not whether he has a wife waiting him at home - and she knows not — but he meets her clandesinely — not as a man of honor, but as a damned scoundrel." The voice of the veteran rang out like a bugle call to battle. "There, I have said it. I never took your oath, but I'm on guard. The grandchild of my old Captain is in peril — and by —, no, I won't take His holy name upon my lips in anger - but, Vance, I am on guard."

"This is a remarkable city for melodrama," sneered Flood. "I came here this morning and found the stenographer kneeling by the side of the blustering young man there, and now comes this impossible old person—"

"Say, you human skunk—" the doctor's fist was clenched, and his eyes blazing—"I am in the office of my friend; I am in the presence of ladies; or the impossible old person would take one poke at your marble jaw and break it."

"This is infamous," and Flood assumed a defiant position.

"Doctor, will you listen to me a moment," and Wilberton Vance stepped between the stranger and his old friend. "As you have said, there are ladies present, and my office is not adapted to the prize ring—"

"There is a back yard here and the ladies will remain in the office while this importation from the Bowery, in New York, finds out whether I am putting up a bluff, or not."

Marion had not said a word — not even to Norma, who stood transfixed staring at Flood and then at the doctor. She knew that her indiscreetness, to say the least, had brought these men to a point where a personal altercation was difficult to avoid. Marion came quickly to the side of the doctor, and laid her hand upon his arm.

"You have been my good friend always," she said.

"I am not less your friend, Marion, because I seek to keep beyond reproach the name of your sister."

"It would be a reproach to her if you quarreled with this stranger on her account," persisted the girl. The eyes of wonderful blue — the tender, wistful eyes looking into the face of her staunch old friend was fast melting his fierce anger.

"Mr. Flood, I am not accusing you of wrong doing," said Vance, "but I must reiterate what the doctor has said, you are a stranger to us all. Her father was my friend. I am the guardian of these girls, his daughters, and I have the right to know. May I ask you this question, 'Did you meet Norma Lane in the conventional manner that the usages of society permit?'

"I know of no law, or custom among gentlemen that will compel me to violate a confidence that may exist between that young woman and myself. If she desires to explain I shall offer no protest."

"She shall explain," exclaimed Neil. Flood slowly turned and with sneering smile expressed his contempt for the speaker more forcibly than words could have done. Neil felt that the moment had come for him to act. He had borne much. Turning to his employer and friend, he said, "Mr. Vance, I owe you much. No one knows how much except myself, but that fellow must answer to me for that silent insult — and answer now."

"One moment, Neil," Vance quickly cried. "Until Norma gives you the right to speak, I alone possess the right. Mr. Flood, if you are free to pay this girl honorable attention I have no disposition to interfere. If you have not, it would be well for you to leave this city. She is an orphan. Her father was my friend—aye, more than friend—my brother—bound by an oath sacred in the sight of Heaven. Her father was an Elk, if you know not what that means, I can tell you."

"Mr. Vance," and the stranger spoke with apparent feeling, "I honor those sentiments, and I honor you for the manner in which you have presented them."

"Perhaps, gentlemen," and Vance turned to the doctor and to Neil, "there is an apology due Mr. Flood."

"Let her tell me what this means. Let her come to me as she once came when there were no secrets that either cared to hide. Norma, Norma — come back to me."

"I cannot, Neil, I cannot," she murmured, coldly.

## CHAPTER FOUR.

HE Lodge of Elks at Lake City had not held a social session since the death of Henry S. Lane, who had been the first Exalted Ruler of a lodge that had reason to be proud of its membership. In the Charter list were Judges of the Courts, an ex-

Governor, leading business men, bankers and manufacturers. As has been said, Lane was one of the leading men of the city, not only as the head of a great business institution, but a man of wide charity, of loving and generous disposition.

It was fitting, therefore, that an Order whose beneficence is felt wherever it exists, and whose gentle charities are known only to themselves, the recipients and Heaven, should elect a man as its leader who never turned his back coldly upon a widow struggling to live and keep her little ones about her, or withheld his hand when ragged children paused in their play, as he passed, to catch his smile which fell upon them like a benediction. It was he, as Exalted Ruler, who organized the first Charity fund of the lodge and made it the most loved benefaction in Lake City.

If from God's beautiful somewhere there comes to earth on Christmas Day, invisible hosts on silent wing, to see what men, on whom the gifts of fortune had been showered, would do for Earth's poor, hungry ones, they could have swept back on pinions—glory tinted to the open gates of Pearl, that first Elks' Christmas, singing a glad new song when "the least of these," as the Master called them, were bountifully fed and generously clothed.

It was natural, therefore, that the rich who knew him well, and the poor who loved him well, paused from all duties when he was put to rest. It was a wan faced little one, who had stood close beside him on the occasion of the Elks' first Christmas offering, who wondered as the plumed hearse rolled by, "if God had anybody left to help Him, now that Mr. Lane was gone."

It was natural, therefore, that the social features of Elkdom should be omitted for a longer season than usual. It was natural, also, that the daughters of Henry S. Lane should desire to express in some tangible form their gratefulness for the brotherly attentions shown by the local Lodge of Elks.

When the word was passed along to all that could be seen that Norma and Marion Lane would come, a hurried change was made by the Committee, and an announcement made that an impromptu ladies' social would be given.

Margery was informed that there was work for her to do in the kitchen. A waiter from the neighboring cafe was engaged to help prepare for the event. When it was learned that ladies would be present, the members proceeded to inspect their dress suits at once, and from an informal stag affair, it was changed to an evening function of unusual elegance.

Vance sent for Dr. Harley and said to him: "The Elks have a social tonight. There will be ladies present. I want you there, and you must not refuse me. You had best think of something you may care to say, for I shall doubtless call upon you."

"I had better wear my store clothes, I suppose," replied the Doctor.

"And by the way," continued Vance, "I invited Flood. I do not know as yet what his plans or purposes are, but he

talks fair, and I felt that it might do no harm to invite him as my guest."

"Old Bill Gibbs has got a pet skunk and a rattlesnake at home, you might borrow them — but it ain't my affair — I'll come. All I ask is, don't put me near him at the table, I might be tempted to do something unparliamentary."

It was a regular meeting night of the Lake City Lodge on which the banquet or social was held, and long before the meeting, Neil and Harold, Kiser, the restaurant man, and Margery were on hand to prepare for the event.

"I think I had better make the punch, Neil," said Harold.

"Better have Kiser do it, he is more familiar with that sort of work," replied Neil.

"Hoch der Kaiser," cried Harold, quite content to let some one else do the work. "Doctor Harley told me he would be here tonight as a guest of Mr. Vance, and in honor of the event would wear evening dress the first time in twenty years," said Neil.

"Good for the doctor. Now we will ask Vance to have the old boy respond to the toast, 'The Ladies,' " and Harold peered into the lodge room where the members were beginning to gather, to see if the toastmaster had arrived. "That rare old bachelor," he continued, "would be just the man to respond to that toast."

"Perhaps a member of the lodge should make the response — you are the man for that I should think," replied Neil.

"I respond to that toast with Jean Vance present? With her eyes fixed upon me I'd stammer and break down."

"You might quote poetry, as you usually do. It was because of your familiarity with the poets that I considered you well fitted for that part in the program.

"About the time I should get started I could recall nothing except Tennyson's "Madeline' and spout:

"'Thou art not steep'd in golden langours,
No tranced summer calm is thine,
Ever varying Madeline.
Thro' light and shadow thou dost range,
Sudden glances, sweet and strange,
Delicious spites and darling angers,
And airy forms of flitting change.'"

"An admirable description of Jean," said Neil, as in his eyes there came a trace of pain — and the low sigh told that another filled his thoughts.

"That sigh tells me something has gone wrong, Neil."

"Yes, very, very wrong."

"I might guess that the girl and the man will be here tonight, both of them."

"Yes, both of them"—and Neil's face grew stern.

"Let me prophesy for a moment and my prophetic eye takes in a scene that shows the mists of doubt all cleared away — and this girl loving the poets as I do will some day read these lines to you, and when she does, she will not be obliged to wait for death to be clasped in the embrace for which she then will yearn. Mark well my words — or my quotation, rather," and Harold with excellent modulation repeated these lines — the lines which haunted Neil morning and night for many days thereafter:

"'My whole soul waiting silently,
All naked in the sultry sky
Droops blinded with his shining eye;
I will possess him or will die.
I will grow round him in his place,
Grow, live, die looking on his face,
Die, dying clasp'd in his embrace!"

"That is all very fine, Harold, but she — oh, there is ever one she — and that one all too often forgets."

Unnoticed by the young men Margery had entered the dining hall and listened with open mouth to Harold's reading of the lines from "Fatima."

"Why didn't you wait and make that speech at the meetin'?" she asked.

"Margery, my beautiful one," began Harold, "There is an opportunity—"

"Cut it — cut it out," she cried. "I'm not your beautiful one."

"Perhaps not, I meant that in a Pickwickian sense, fair Margery."

"I don't care anything about your picnician sense — but cut out the 'taffy.'"

"That is all right, Margery, dear, now there is an opportunity for you to win a measure of immortality in the kitchen," and Harold bowed profoundly.

"Yes, I got a chance to win 75 cents a washin' your dirty dishes. 'Pon my word I've wondered sometimes whether you was born that way or whether you got to be a sort of durned fool when you growed up," and with that Margery returned to the kitchen.

"Oh! that was a soaker, wasn't it?" he said. "Neil, you think that that man Flood will be here tonight?"

"Mr. Vance invited him."

"I will see if he is in the parlor. I don't care to have the girls tangled up with him."

"What girls?" asked Neil rather sullenly.

"Jean and her friend."

"You need not worry about them. There is only one that he is paying attention to."

"I take it that Flood is a pretty slick citizen and girls are inclined to take to a fellow like that. How strange it is

that the angelic sex, as some chump has called them, take to a man like that. The less they know about a man, particularly a handsome devil, the more they care for him."

"If I caught Jean making languishing eyes at him there would be an item for the opposition newspaper."

"You need not fear for her. She has a father to watch over her. An orphan old enough to do as she pleases largely is more easily the prey of such as he." It was Neil and not Harold who went to the parlor door, but Flood was not there. Two or three ladies had arrived, the wives of members who came early.

"Had I my wits about me," Neil was thinking, "I would have brought some roses and have placed them where Norma shall sit. She might care for my flowers, even if she no longer cares — no, I cannot say it even to myself — I will not yield to him. His smile of triumph yesterday haunts me all the time."

"The girls are coming; they will be here in a few moments, see?" and Harold called to Neil.

While the young men were peering through the curtains Margery returned and, looking over the table, helped herself to a sandwich and a pickle, and drawing a chair to the table began eating. Presently Neil and Harold discovered her, and in a moment were by her side.

"Margery, that will do," said Neil, sharply.

"Of course, it's all I intended to take jist now."

"If you are hungry, Margery, stay in the kitchen and eat what you need. You are not expected to come into the banquet room."

"Of course, Margery ain't good enough to be invited to the banquet."

"You are invited to be present to do certain work and get paid for it; most assuredly you were not invited here as our guest." During this brief discussion of Margery's duties, Harold was preparing a drink for her. He put a spoonful of wine in a glass of water, placed therein a bit of lemon and a small portion of sugar.

"Maid of Astolot," he said with mock humility, "here is nectar, I fain would serve you."

"I'll take a drink, but one of these days, young feller, you'll call me a name that will make me git back at you."

"Kind Heaven forbid," he replied, assuming a tragic pose.

"'Pon my soul I believe he is drunk," she said, as she hurried from the room.

"I wonder if you would be so full of fun if that man came between you and Jean?" asked Neil.

"I cannot answer that, but I am sure I should have a bit of fun with the man from New York. One has got to do something heroic to make an impression on that young woman, and so I'd begin by making an impression on Flood, with my fist — that is, if he didn't impress me first."

Harold was interrupted at this point by the entrance of Jean and Eleanor, who came laden with baskets of flowers.

"We do not propose to be outdone if we are simply imitators," remarked Jean.

"Very charming of you, I'm sure," Harold said.

"How very original you are, Mr. Brady," was Jean's response.

"Jean, you are positively cruel to Mr. Brady," cried Eleanor.

"He don't mind it, and besides if we relieve him of work he will forgive anything we may say."

> "For women must work, and men must weep, Our victuals and drink will not long keep For the herd outside is groaning."

"The poet would turn over in his grave if he could hear that wretched parody," Jean answered.

"Jean, can you recall the lines from which Mr. Brady has given his impromptu version?" Eleanor asked.

"It is from Charles Kingsley's 'Three Fishers':

"'For men must work and women must weep, And there's little to earn and many to keep Though the harbor bar be moaning."

"At least his version is clever for an impromptu effort," and Eleanor laughed heartily.

"You would not encourage him, Eleanor, if you suffered through months of impromptu effusions," was Jean's response. "If he only would attempt an original idea I would not mind it," she continued.

"I have one now," said Harold.

"Don't let it escape you. An idea should be considered a most valuable possession where there is such a dearth of them," retorted Jean in shriller tones than usual.

"It is not only an idea, but a discovery," he said.

"Will wonders never cease?"

"May we share with you this new idea, or discovery?" asked Miss Clay.

"Most assuredly. I have discovered how Mr. Vance's daughter resembles Cordelia, Lear's youngest daughter," and Harold wore an air of wisdom.

"In what manner, pray?" asked Eleanor.

"'Her voice was ever soft, gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman!"

"I accept the rebuke, Mr. Brady, and congratulate you on relying upon Shakespeare instead of upon yourself."

Further conversation was interrupted by Norma and Marion, who came with their contribution of flowers. Jean and Eleanor congratulated the girls upon having originated the pleasing departure and related how they had been imitators in the grand work of making beautiful the tables of their friends.

"We are under such deep obligations," Norma said in answer to the congratulations.

"You should not look upon it in the light of an obligation," replied Neil, as he drew near the group.

Norma bowed, but did not reply, and Neil turned aside deeply hurt at her indifference — if not deliberate cut.

Marion was at his side in a moment, saying: "It is very dear of you, Neil, to put it that way, but you know how we felt about it."

"I understand, Marion," he replied softly.

As Norma was placing the flowers in vases sent for that purpose, she came near Neil, and for a moment their eyes met — in his an appeal — in hers no kindly answer.

"May I speak to you a moment," Neil said.

"If you wish," and Norma's manner was chillingly indifferent.

"Why do you avoid me?"

"It is best so."

"Do you mean that this stranger of whom you know nothing has poisoned your mind against me?" If Neil's knowledge of the so-called weaker sex had been greater he would have pursued a different method. Jealousy does not possess reasoning powers, is never diplomatic, but blunders onward like a maddened animal. Norma's reply was not soothing: "We never discuss you."

"You meet him secretly," he asserted.

"What right have you to repeat such rumors?"

"The right of a man who loves you."

"When did I give you that right?"

"That matters not," he answered angrily. "I shall keep that scoundrel from making your name a by-word and reproach."

She did not answer until the wave of anger receded and left her pale and indignant. "You are insulting, sir," she said.

"Norma," he answered pleadingly, "I meant no insult and you know it. I simply wish to win you back."

"The man you traduce would not dare insult me as you have done."

Thus was the red flag waved again in the face of a maddened animal.

"Not a man," he answered fiercely, "but a devil — do you hear me, a devil."

"Never speak to me again, Neil Dare."

"Norma, Norma, one word more" — it was the lover — not the angry man, whose heart cried out for one last word.

"No," she answered bitterly and turned away from him.

Marion had been watching them, and when Norma started to leave the room she was soon by the side of her angry sister.

"What is the matter, Norma?"

"I will never speak to him again."

"Norma, you will regret this some day."

"Do not preach to me — go comfort your friend if you wish."

"I am not ashamed to comfort him and love him-"

"You love him, do you?" Norma sneered, "love him and confess it, when he has been begging me to—"

"Norma, have you no shame? I love as a sister may love a brother — the brother I had hoped he might be."

"Neil," she said as she joined him, "Neil, I am sorry."

"Yes, little one — a beautiful dream is ended."

The sudden entrance of Mr. Vance at this moment prevented further general conversation.

"Ladies, we are very grateful for your thoughtfulness. Never before has our banquet room looked so beautiful. I am certainly pleased that you and Miss Clay are here, Jean. You did not tell me you were coming."

"I did not tell you for fear you might discourage the idea, but we had a special invitation from a gentleman who informs us he is a member of the Committee of Arrangements."

"I need not have two guesses to tell you his name."

"It might encourage you, papa, to do your very best tonight when you learn that Eleanor brought that bunch of beauties there, to decorate your place at the table."

"How did you know where I should sit?"

"Harold told me."

Who?"

"Mr. Harold Brady. I recall that you told me not long since that he was the lord high Esquire of your Lodge."

"There is no 'lord' to it, Jean, just plain Esquire," said Harold.

"Well, plain Esquire, didn't you tell me?"

"I probably intimated something to that effect," Brady answered.

"Young man, I may be obliged to prefer charges against you," said Vance.

"Oh, there is nothing in the ritual which prevents telling everything at a ladies' social. No secrets go there."

"You imagine that is real witty, don't you, Mr. Brady?" Jean's moue seemed a sort of invitation that Harold could scarce resist even in the presence of her father.

"Everything is ready, Mr. Vance," said Neil, "and the boys are clamoring."

"I do not wonder considering the unusual attractions," replied Mr. Vance. "Tell the boys we will be ready in a moment. Ladies, may I ask you to follow me to the parlor. You will be invited to join us when we are ready to receive you."

The girls were escorted to the parlor, where were a number of the sex who came to enjoy the first ladies' social session held by the Lake City Elks. Vance then repaired to the lodge room and asked the brothers to fall in line, placing the guests, among whom were Dr. Harley and Cyrus Flood, in front, and led the way at once to the banquet room.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you will be seated, but at the sound of the gavel you will rise. You are aware that this is our first ladies' social. It was more by accident than design, as the daughters of our beloved, but ever absent brother, Henry S. Lane, begged that they might have an opportunity of expressing in some form their gratefulness, for what we know was our simple duty, but which they consider an act beyond their power to repay. They have brought these fragrant blooms to show that they, like our great brotherhood, cannot forget. The committee to escort the ladies are waiting, and I need not tell you that when the gavel falls each guest and brother is on his feet to pay the tribute of respect that womanhood demands."

As he concluded the parlor doors were opened and the Committee, Neil, Harold, and three other members, escorted the ladies to tables reserved for them.

When the ladies entered the banquet hall the lodge members answered the quick, sharp raps by rising and with most hearty applause, remained standing until their guests were seated. Someone then started the lodge chorus:

"For they are jolly good fellows, As ever they can be, We will drink to their beauty,
It is simply our duty,
For jolly good fellows are we."

While Margery's place was in the kitchen where she had plenty to do, she could not resist the temptation to see how the ladies were dressed, how they were seated and what gentlemen were seated with them. There were strict orders that the door leading into the kitchen should be kept closed, but she, having made up her mind to do the utterly undreamed of act, came hurriedly to the table where the ladies were seated, and in a loud voice asked: "Marion, can't I help you to something?"

Even Harold with his fund of resources was nonplussed for the moment. Neil, who was standing near, turned upon the woman, and restraining the anger that arose at the sight of the bedraggled and ill-dressed dishwasher, said in low, but commanding tones: "Go back to the kitchen at once, Margery."

"All right. The Sultan of Sliberia has given his orders," she said as she looked over the tables filled to the utmost limit by the members and their friends.

"A new title for the Chairman of the Committee — brothers, did you catch it? — 'The Sultan of Sly-beer-ia,' said Harold.

A hearty laugh followed this promptly forgiven pun, as it relieved the embarrassment of the occasion. As Margery marched toward the kitchen with the dignity of a grenadier, the boys began to sing:

"For she is a jolly good fellow As ever she can be——"

Vance rapped for order and said: "Ladies and Gentle-men—What I shall say to you, as master of ceremonies shall be brief. I shall say it now while the dinner is being served.

I wish to impress upon the minds of our guests that so far as the lines of the poem — if poem it may be called — does not include the Elks; I allude to the verses claimed by an erratic Son of Kentucky, now gone beyond the sundown, and by a gifted poetess of the North whose passion laden lines are familiar to most of you. Doubtless you have them now in mind:

"'Laugh and the world laughs with you, Weep, and you weep alone."

"Whoever wrote it never heard the dominant chord in the heart song of the Elk. We feast, we laugh, we welcome with hearty handclasp the friend and brother. The glasses may click at times, but when sorrow comes to one of us, it comes to all.

"We teach loyalty and love of country and flag; we believe that all things good comes from the Fountain Head of all goodness; we teach Charity and Brotherly Love, twin virtues that must live forever. In the words of the great and well beloved American: "With malice toward none, and with charity for all"—I bid you welcome."

The applause that greeted these remarks was most generous, and with laughter and good fellowship the dinner was concluded.

Following the banquet there were speeches and songs by the members who were gifted in certain lines. Finally Toast-Master Vance anounced that Dr. Jno. P. Harley, a guest, would respond to the toast, "The Ladies."

As the doctor slowly arose he was greeted with a reception that caused a wave of red to sweep over the grim face of the veteran, while Vance then concluded:

"'He jests at scars who never felt a wound,' says Shakespeare, and he who will now address you wears a scar that is a badge of honor won on the field of battle. If on his heart some woman has left a scar, it is hidden. Because of his unselfish devotion, his chivalric demeanor toward all woman-kind, he has been chosen to respond to the toast, 'The Ladies.'"

"My friends," said the doctor, "more leap years than I care to count — particularly in this presence — have come and gone and left me free to discuss this theme, worthy of one more gifted, without fear of receiving a curtain lecture when the hour comes for sleep.

"It was a pessimistic German who wrote: 'Frauen und Jungfrauen soll man loben, es sie erlogen.'"

The speaker paused a moment when someone called:

"Come again, Doctor."

"Give us something easy," cries another.

"I had hoped," the doctor resumed, "that you would not demand the cold, unfeeling English. Even with my imperfect German it might pass as a compliment with those who have neglected Goethe and Schiller in their native and melodious numbers. Truth, and your demands compel the blunt interpretation: 'Women and girls must be praised whether it be truth or not.' Therefore, I have been chosen to praise those whom we individually or collectively love, whether it be truth or not.

"I am sure, however, the ladies will forgive an old fellow whose pathway in life led only into thickets of loneliness, and who never knew the sweetness of these lines of Bobby Burns:

"''Tis when a youthful, loving, modest pair
In other's arms breathe out the tender tale
Beneath the milk-white thorn that scents the evening gale."

You will not remember long, ladies, what a possible dyspeptic may have written, when you recall that the masters of painting and sculpture gave each angelic form upon canvas or in marble the face and figure of a woman; and yet, not a mother's son of us would marry an angel if he could. A man wants a woman, tender and true; a woman passionate, but pure; a woman warm with rich, red blood.

"A man with such sweetheart or wife will snap his fingers at Solomon with his hundreds of wives, and more hundreds of lady acquaintances as he reads in Proverbs: 'It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop than with a brawling woman.'

"The man who finds one woman, only one, fairer and dearer than all the world beside, who, caring for her tenderly, sees her babies and his grow up about them, to honor father and mother, that their days may be long upon the earth—is a man, who, while yet on earth has had a glimpse of Heaven.

"So much as I have been told of the teachings of this Order I am led to say to woman, marry an Elk — he has committed himself before his brothers. He has promised to honor the sanctity of home.

"It must have been an Elk that Burns saw with prophetic vision when he had an old woman say with wondrous tenderness:

"'John Anderson my jo John,
We clam the hill thegither,
And mony a canty day John
We've had wi one anither;
Now we maun totter down John,
But hand in hand we'll go,
An sleep thegither at the foot,
John Anderson my Jo.'"

The doctor sat down with tumultuous applause ringing in his ears, and it pleased the old man to note that the ladies were first to lead in the demonstrations and last to leave off. The toastmaster did not interrupt the congratulations that came from every side, but through it all the doctor's eyes sought out a little girl who did not know quite what to do, whether to laugh or cry for joy, over the demonstrations herold friend and physician was receiving.

When quiet had been restored, Vance said: "I voice not only the thanks of the ladies, but of each brother present for the response to our toast so admirably handled by the doctor. We must make him one of us, and use him as occasion demands. We have with us another guest, a stranger, who is here on business, and we will be pleased to hear from Mr. Cyrus Flood, of New York."

"As a stranger to all of you," said Mr. Flood, "I take pleasure in expressing my thanks for being permitted to share with you a most delightful evening. It is all the more interesting because of the presence of the ladies who have shown a gentle forbearance with the conviviality that I am told is characteristic of your social events. If I may paraphrase the lines quoted by my friend, the toastmaster, I would have them read:

"'Drink, and the boys drink with you, get drunk and you're not alone."

"I may say"—a low hiss came from somewhere at the table—he was not sure, but a scowl swept over his face as he looked at Neil Dare, standing at the time near where Norma was seated. With fierce anger he shouted: "I know where that insult comes from."

A number of the lodge members were on their feet by this time, and loud were the murmurs of disapproval.

Vance rapped vigorously with the gavel, and quiet reigned again. "Brothers, however much he misunderstands us," Vance said with emotion, "he is our guest. He is not the only one who has misjudged us — he is not alone in his mistake. Proceed, Mr. Flood, you shall not be interrupted."

"You will pardon me, Mr. Vance, but my self-respect prevents me remaining longer with you," and Flood abruptly left the table. He paused a moment at the door seeking an answering signal from Norma, who sat with downcast eyes, her face pale and drawn.

"We have had such an enjoyable evening," said Mr. Vance, "that I regret what has just occurred. Regrets avail nothing. My brothers, it is eleven o'clock. You know the significance of this hour. It is a moment of tender memories. As we forget the darkness of the night watching the rosy tints of morn, as we forget the chill of winter drinking the sweet breath of spring, so we shall forget what has just passed while we recall that sentiment that lives ever in our hearts, but which blooms fragrantly at this hour — Our Absent Brothers."

## CHAPTER FIVE.

YRUS FLOOD paid daily visits to the office of Wilberton Vance. He was careful to go when Vance was present. He had no desire to meet Neil Dare alone, either in the office or elsewhere. He shunned the presence of Dr. Harley quite as

carefully as he did Neil, and believing his operations in the country were unknown to Vance, pretended that he was most anxious to enter into a contract to equip the Lake City and South Eastern Traction Line, so far as the Company, he claimed to represent, could do. When Vance asked him to come with some definite proposition he made plausible excuses and deferred action until he could hear further from headquarters.

There is little doubt that he could have accomplished much more had it not been that he spent more time with Norma Lane, or in futile attempts to meet her, than he had anticipated.

That he was infatuated with the young woman was evident to all who frequented the Casino.

At this resort there was, in addition to the usual park attractions, a Summer theatre, and Norma, having little to do, and money to spend as she wished, was an almost daily visitor.

It was at the Casino that she first met Flood. On her part it was accidental, but he, knowing no one who could introduce him, carefully planned a meeting—or rather watched for an opportunity that would give him a reasonable excuse for addressing her.

He was quick to observe that she was not of that class of girls eager to make the acquaintance of a stranger who appeared to have money. There were many young woman of the city who frequented the popular resort, that put themselves in his way, but these did not interest him. It was the handsome girl who occasionally glanced at him, in whom he was interested.

Flood spent money freely when the opportunity presented itself, and became quite friendly with the manager of the Casino. He had a speaking acquaintance with some of the ladies and gentlemen belonging to the Opera Comuany which had been engaged to give a season of light opera — presenting well known and well worn operatic productions.

The manager of the Casino, who was a member of the Lake City Lodge of Elks, while not acquainted with Norma—that is, not possessing a speaking acquaintance—knew the history of her family. When Flood asked for an introduction to Norma, the manager declined. "I knew her father. He was a prominent man, a man highly respected, and Miss Lane, while she comes here frequently alone, is a most estimable young lady. I have spoken to her, but always concerning the attractions or like subject, being simply a matter of business.

"I assure you I would not have the effrontery to introduce her to a stranger. It is all right," he continued, "for men to meet and mingle without the formality of an introduction, but not such as she. Miss Lane is a lady, in the fullest sense of the word."

"I wish to say," replied Flood, "that while I would like to meet the young woman, I consider your course most honorable. I thank you heartily for the explanation you have given. My intentions are as honorable as my desire is earnest. Few men can look with indifference upon a young woman as handsome as she."

Nothing more was said by either of the men at that time, but Flood sought the companionship of a dissolute young man who had once been considered acceptable among ladies and gentlemen. The young man — Mark Singleton — had forfeited all right to recognition by those who cared to be considered respectable. His widowed mother, once comfortably well to do, was now nearing life's end a broken hearted woman, who had spent all to keep her son from the State prison.

When Mark Singleton had spent all his money, and all that he could get from his mother, he became one of those indescribable creatures who lived upon the uncertain wages of a woman lost to all sense of shame.

As soon as Flood learned Singleton's history he began to put himself in the way of the young man, but never at any time when Norma might see him, for he assumed that she must know something about him.

It must be said for Norma that she never frequented the Casino at night unless accompanied by a friend. Singleton and Flood became acquainted in that easy manner which men about town acquire. Singleton, with money, was not considered a nuisance at the saloons of Lake City, but Singleton, penniless, was. It was on one of those penniless occasions that Flood became his "Angel," as Singleton was wont to regard him. The term, as is generally known, is applied to the individual who furnishes the funds to keep a losing theatrical attraction on the road, and Singleton had played his part in a dissolute life drama so strongly that his season had closed early.

One evening, and this was a week or more before the events already narrated, when Vance and Flood first met, Flood followed the young man and, observing that he had been refused drinks at the more reputable places, kept Mark

in sight, realizing that an opportunity would offer when he could play the Samaritan act.

He had formed a plan to appear in the light of a hero to Norma Lane if he could get Singleton to enact the role of villain. It was an old and threadbare plot, but it had worked so often, it surely would again.

Singleton had drifted into a place where there was little pretense of appealing to the better class of men who drink. Flood followed unobserved, and pausing at the door, listened to what occurred. He could only surmise what Singleton had said, for the request was made in low tones. The man behind the bar simply shook his head.

"Bill," said Singleton in sharp tones, "I used to loan you ten at a time."

"You got it back, didn't you?"

"I am not at all certain that I did, but even if that is true it's mighty small in you refusing me tonight."

"You haven't any tens about you now, have you?"

"If I had you'd have met me with a smile instead of a scowl."

"Good night, Mark."

"Oh, you go-"

Flood, who had heard it all, came in quite unconcerned. He spoke pleasantly to Singleton: "Won't you join me?"

"Thanks - some other time - I was just going "

"What will you have?" asked the man behind the bar. To have them turn away was like taking money from the till.

Flood left the change lying upon the bar as he led the conversation upon sporting themes until their glasses were empty, when he again ordered.

He observed that the young fellow seemed anxious to get away, and as he had something for Mark to do, was desirous of finding a place where there was more privacy. "I'm sort of glad I've met you," said Mark, "for I am short tonight. I've spent many a good dollar with that fellow back there and tonight I asked him to set them up, but he turned me down cold. I'll own up that I wanted a drink, but I hated to see you spend your money with Bill."

"That is all right, but let us go where we can talk over a business proposition. Are you fairly well acquainted in this City?"

"I know the place as well as any one, but I'm not fixed to keep up my end tonight."

"That is all right. We will go somewhere and have lunch together. You may be able to help me," Flood said.

"Well, I've got more time than anything else," was the reply.

Mark had not found so generous a friend for many months, and when Flood asked him if he knew Wilberton Vance, Mark informed him that while they were not chums he knew the gentleman by sight.

"This town is not on to my game," said Flood, when they had dined, "and I am not ready to let you in, but if you have the time, and keep a level head and a close mouth, there will be something in it for you."

"I'm your man for any thing unless it is something that would send me over."

"Nothing of that kind, I assure you. I am not looking for trouble, either," Flood replied. "I asked you," Flood continued, "if you knew Mr. Vance. I will explain this much to you. Vance is in my way. He is likely to block my game. This game is business—straight business. What I would like to have you do is to keep an eye upon him. When he leaves town, follow him. Do not let him know you are following him. If you find him talking to a farmer, either in the city here or elsewhere, find out if possible what they were talking about, and report to me."

"Detective work, ain't it?" and Mark warmed to the idea readily.

"It is along that line."

"I am your man."

"Meet me at the Grand Central Hotel tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock. I will give you full instructions and expense money. We will say good night here," continued Flood, "as it is best that what we do shall be done as secretly as possible."

"Good night, Mr. ---"

"Flood is my name. Good night."

At the conference on the following morning Flood told Singleton that if he found that Vance would remain in his office that day, he should meet him at the Casino. "While this is not your business, yet, I'll pay you quite as liberally if you aid me in a little matter. This, of course, is strictly between ourselves. Do you know a young lady by the name of Lane, who is often at the Casino?"

"I used to know her very well, but that was before I got to going the pace. She don't recognize me now."

"I wish to meet the lady," said Flood.

"An introduction from me would kill you dead with her."

"That may be, but how would this do?" and Flood outlined his plan.

"With a few drinks in me, I could do it," replied Singleton.

"Then meet me at Casino tomorrow afternoon."

When Mark Singleton left the hotel he was in possession of more money than he had been able to call his own for many weeks. His first move was to bolster up his courage for the contemptible part he was to play. He visited two or three places where his former associates, who had been forced to give him the cut direct, were wont to gather.

Some of these were present on this occasion, and Mark noted that they suddenly became so interested in a discussion that he was not observed. Quite well was he aware that this interest was assumed, and carelessly tossing a bill upon the bar, called for a "Martini." Carefully he counted the change.

"You have a small tab against me. It has stood a long time — I want to pay it."

"You don't owe anything here," was the reply. The proprietor had served the drink. He believed the small sum Mark Singleton owed him was worth more on the tab then in the cash drawer. "You are all right, Mark; you are square with me."

"I am now," Mark said as he left a half dollar upon the bar. "I owed you forty cents — have one on me," and he turned away without a glance at his former associates. He then went to the saloon where Flood had first met him. "I want the amount of that 'tab' you have against me."

"What's the use?"

"I came here for the purpose of paying it, you slob, but if you don't want it, all right."

"It's one fifty."

"One hundred and fifty dollars?"

"No, one hundred and fifty cents. I hope you don't take me for a 'chump' as well as a 'slob,' as you called me. Me let you git in for that much money? I hope not."

"There is your money."

"Have a drink?" asked the saloon man when he had found the account.

"I want the slip," replied Mark.

"Cert. Have a drink, I say?"

"No."

"Made a touch, didn't you?"

"Yes, and I'll make another one of these days — I'll touch that blooming nose of yours. I'll tell the Anti-Saloon League

about you, 'Bill,' they'll hire you for a warning to everybody that drinks."

"Good-bye, Mark. It's like parting with a mother-in-law to see you go," and the saloonist smiled at his attempt at wit.

"Say, Bill, I'll just buy one on that," and their glasses clinked.

Having settled his bar bills, Mark felt that he was once more a man, and when he met Flood at two o'clock that afternoon he said: "I'm all 'lit up,' now give out the program."

"I have reason to think that the lady will be here soon. If she is alone, speak to her — follow her — make yourself as 'fresh' as possible, but, of course, you will not use insulting language. When things get interesting I'll stroll by, paying no attention whatever until you say, 'ain't you going to kiss me, dear?' Then I'll come into the game."

"Great - a hero from Hoboken."

"No, from Manhattan," and Flood laughed.

"Yes, and I'll take four 'Manhattans' on you when it's over. You don't mean to smash me on the jaw, do you?"

"Not at all. I'll rush in and grab you by the coat collar and fling you aside, and as you stagger back I'll call out: 'What does this mean, dastard?'"

"That is right — don't forget to call me dastard — that always gets a hand in melodrama," Mark replied.

"Then you retreat a few steps," Flood continued, "and then turn on me and say: 'I'll even this up with you, my fine fellow'——"

"Yes, that's the gag, I'd almost forgotten it — 'my fine fellow' — and then what?"

"Then go and leave the rest to me. Get out of sight quick — there she comes now," and Mark strolled down the walk to meet Norma.

## CHAPTER SIX.

V

ERY few of the lodge members had heard of Cyrus Flood until he was introduced at the Social Session. While his remarks were intended to be humorous, they were not so received. He had voiced an idea in the minds of those who know

little of the underlying principles of the Order—its beautiful charity and its belief in the brotherhood of man; and in presenting this idea he had anticipated laughter and applause, but instead he had been greeted with silence broken by a sibilant hiss. His surprise was great, his chagrin unmeasured.

Even though it was late he sought Mark Singleton, knowing quite well where he might be found.

Singleton was not well pleased with the part he had been induced to play, that gave opportunity for Flood to make the acquaintance of Norma Lane.

He played the part as outlined, and when Flood found him that night after the Elks' Social, he found Mark sober. Mark had spent the evening at a Cafe which boasted of an aristocratic patronage. Slowly he sipped a cooling draught that did not heat his brain. Men whom he knew well came into the place, but gave no sign of recognition. He recalled that Flood was an invited guest of a Society that had black-balled him. He grew bitter as he recalled how he played the infamous role assigned him. It was only two weeks since he had heard Norma Lane say: "I remember when I used to think you were a gentleman, Mark Singleton." Only two weeks and it had seemed months — months since he had

leered at the young woman, who once knew him and respected him.

How well he remembered every word she said, how she had shamed him until he felt tempted to run and give Flood no chance for his mock heroics.

When sober he felt a deeper sense of humiliation. Memory was busy that night, and all his shameful past rose up before him.

He remembered with unmeasured shame how a messenger boy with a telegram for the manager passed by when he had said as planned: "Won't you kiss me, dear?" And Norma had answered: "Coward, and drunkard, is it possible you have come to this?"

Vividly he recalled how she told the boy, "Get the officer—tell the manager I want him," and how he waited as if some invisible power held him fast to earth until Flood came, until Flood hurled him aside, crying out as he had rehearsed: "Dastard, what do you mean?"

"He remembered that Flood and the girl he once knew walked away together while he was forced to make a hurried escape from the grounds or be arrested.

An arrest on such a charge meant the workhouse. He remembered that even in his sotted revels during the week that followed. He could not forget the disgraceful part he had been called upon to play. Old and silly as the plot was, it seemed to have answered the purpose intended. Flood and Norma were together almost daily.

He had arrived at the conclusion that it would be best to go to Wilberton Vance, confess his part in the plot and beg for forgiveness. Then it was that Flood made his appearance. Singleton saw that he was greatly agitated, but he was in no mood to ask questions.

"I have work for you tomorrow." Flood's manner was

unusually dictatorial. He had been suave and gracious here-tofore.

"It must be something different from the last job I did for you."

"That is all right — I paid you for it. It certainly did not undermine your reputation here, as I get it."

"I don't care to discuss it farther. What do you want now?"

"I will give you a list of names of stockholders in the Interurban Railway. I want you to see each one of them. Tell them the road is going to the devil unless the management is changed at once."

"That is your real game, is it?"

"That is what I am here for. There are thousands of dollars back of me where there are dollars back of Vance."

"The girl business was a side issue, hey?"

"A mere episode — but we will not discuss the girl question — that is a closed incident."

"When I see these men whose names are on that list and tell them your story, then what?"

"Make them talk — then come to me with everything they say — omit nothing."

"Suppose they ask what I will give for their stock?"

"Offer them forty cents on every dollar paid in, if you are pressed, but that is not what I'm after. Tell each man to let no one know that you have spoken to him. That to get his money back he must say nothing, but act when you give the word. We must prevail on some of these men to ask for injunction proceedings. We must get the road in the Courts. That means delay. That means ruin to Wilberton Vance. That means that my Company will get control of the road," said Flood vehemently.

"What does it mean for Mark Singleton?"

"It means money, of course."

"When will I see the color of some of it?"

"You have not been going hungry lately, have you?"

Flood saw that Singleton was in an unusual mood. He observed that the man usually obsequious was so no longer, and being a student of human nature, changed his tone. "Come to me in the morning," he said, "there will be money for you, and much more of it when we win."

Flood was waiting for Mark in the office of the hotel. He gave the young man an envelope — a large, well filled envelope. "You can count that later, use it freely if it becomes necessary. Keep a memorandum of all you spend upon these men. What you spend upon yourself is no concern of mine. If you find any of them inclined to conviviality, take care of them. Don't be afraid to spend the money. Try and get them to come to the city. Tell them you will give them a good time. Perhaps it would be well to go to a store and buy a new suit of clothes — there are some swell looking outfits I have noticed. When you have puchased what you need, get the fastest team money can secure at a livery and go to Carbuncle, the first town beyond Eden. You need not stop in Eden. I am looking after things in that village."

As has been said, few of the Elk friends of Wilberton Vance had heard of Flood until he appeared at the Social. Then they began to make inquiries. Adroit usually, but all that could be learned was that he registered from New York City, had plenty money to spend, occasionally hiring a conveyance and be away for a day or two. Usually he was to be found at the Casino and generally in the company of Norma Lane. They found, also, that lately he had been seen frequently at night with Mark Singleton, and that usually impecunious individual was spending money as in former days, when he was scattering his inheritance.

While nothing was known concerning the character of Flood, it was a matter of regret that the daughter of their

Past Exalted Ruler should so often be seen in the company of this stranger. Harold Brady had told a few intimate friends what had happened at Vance's office the day before the Social. The story spread and grew no less in its travels and ere long it came to Neil's attention that Norma was being talked about. Neil Dare's close friends hoped that he would pay no further attention to her, but the majority being so loyal to the memory of the father proposed to keep close watch upon the stranger and upon the girl, that no harm should come to her.

That Norma Lane had been indiscreet there was no question. Even the help about the Casino gossiped, and hinted that all was not right. The person of a woman may to an extent be guarded from harm, but Omnipotence can scarcely shield the reputation of one who may be careless of her conduct, even though her character be spotless.

The evening of that day — the day Mark left town to do the work outlined by Flood — the day after the Social, Dr. Harley was invited to the Club to meet a few of the members. He had been treated so generously by the boys at the banquet that he could not refuse, and at the hour named was again the recipient of flattering comment.

"You do me too much honor, gentlemen. It was little I did. I should be happy to do much more for such delightful friends as you have proved yourselves to be. When one sees his shadow lengthen in his afternoon he feels an unusual sense of happiness and security in the friendship of wholesome young men. If circumstances were different I should like to be one of you — that is, if you would accept one of my years."

"One of your years?" John Adams Drake, a rich young lawyer, a member of an old and aristocratic family, laid his hand affectionately upon the shoulder of the veteran as he spoke: "The Elks look not at years, it is the man we care

for. You will understand that more fully one of these days, but we did not ask you to meet us for purposes of mutual felicitation. We have heard rumors today that are disturbing, and we have reason to believe that you can enlighten us if you are free to do so."

"What is it, gentlemen? I am at your service," replied the doctor.

"This man Flood, whose remarks were so ill timed last night—we have heard that he is here to work injury to Wilberton Vance."

"Mr. Vance has been a good friend to me, and my belief is that there are none present who are not friends of his? Am I right?"

"Most assuredly," replied Mr. Drake.

"Then I shall withhold no information that I possess. Vance is the only man who has met this fellow Flood — at least so far as I know — who has any confidence in him whatever. A clever man is Mr. Vance in business matters, and yet he will not believe that Flood is a business enemy. There can be no personal feeling, but, as the old saying goes, 'Corporations have no souls.'

"I have proof sufficient — for me at least — that Flood is an agent of a corporation or syndicate that is conducting an underhand, if not disreputable, effort to secure control of our Interurban Railway.

"I know not how long Flood has been here; we could learn that, of course, by consulting the register at the hotel, but I know he has been here long enough to attempt to corrupt the farmers, at least a portion of them, along the line of the road. I have tried to make that clear to Vance, but he is inclined to make light of it. Flood pretends that he is the agent of the Great Northern Electric Company, with head-quarters in Boston, while he claims New York as his home. One of my old friends living near Eden, Abraham Thomas,

by name, has been approached by this man, who said to Thomas that he came here to equip the road, but that he found things in a bad way financially. My friend Abe is a deacon in the church and I received a lecture, and justly, too, for expressions usually heard in prayer meeting, but with more reverent intentions. I told Abe that the road was all right and that Vance was all right. We had some words in Vance's office, and Flood alluded to me as an 'impossible old person.' I failed to emulate the meekness of Moses in my reply. Gentlemen, that is about all I know of Flood so far as Vance's affairs are concerned."

"You have confirmed the rumors that have reached us," replied Drake. "Do you think, doctor," he continued, "that Flood is not an agent of this Electric Company?"

"Of course, surmise is not proof, but I am certain that it is simply a blind to get information that he could not otherwise secure."

"I am quite certain you are right, and now something must be done. We are all interested in the road, and all are friends of Vance. If we could secure, by honorable means, a letter or even an envelope with the usual business card upon it, we would run this matter down."

"Drake, I'll get that for you — don't ask me how, or ask me anything about it," said Will Hall, a young man of pleasing address, and a favorite of all the ladies of his acquaintance.

"Be careful of Uncle Sam," advised Drake.

"I'll violate no law, but I'll get it," replied the young man.

"Get it, if possible. I'm going East in a few days. I will make it my business to look up this man's business associates if we can get a clue to them."

"And, if possible, Mr. Drake, find out if he is married," said the doctor impressively.

"May I ask why, doctor?"

"I am not violating a confidence, but a friend of mine—an exceptionable young man—a brother in your Order, had every reason to believe that in the near future Norma Lane would have been his wife. She met this fellow—I saw them together—and it hurt me worse than this wound ever did," and the doctor touched the livid scar. "It hurt me because I had hoped to see her Neil Dare's wife. It hurt me because her grandfather carried me from the field of battle and saved my life. Vance told him that she was as sacred as his own flesh and blood, and I told him that I was on guard."

"We are with you, doctor"—"with you," "with you," exclaimed the group.

"Thank you, gentlmen, 'The Three Guardsmen' again, 'One for all and all for one.'

#### CHAPTER SEVEN.

WO days later John Adams Drake was on his way East. In addition to the business which required his presence in New York, he proposed to investigate the Overland Syndicate. Will Hall had succeeded; just how, he did not explain, and

Drake asked no questions. It was surmised, however, that a letter, carelessly thrown aside, revealed all that was needed to put the young attorney on a scent that would cause the Overland Syndicate to send another agent to Lake City. In the mean time, Vance would be backed by sufficient capital to make failure impossible.

Before leaving for the East, Drake wrote Mr. Vance as follows: "You will pardon what may seem an officious act on my part, but if I succeed, it may be greatly to your advantage. A number of your friends at the Club were discussing the presence of one Cyrus Flood, in this city. I have information that leads me to believe that he is not an agent of the firm he pretends to represent.

"Business calls me East. I will be in New York and probably Boston.

"While my trip is occasioned by my own affairs, I will have time to investigate the man who is now working to drive you out of the management of the Lake City & South Eastern. Encourage Flood to believe that you are ignorant of his plans. Do not hint to him that you suspicion he is not the agent of an Electric Company.

"This has been discussed by your friends in and out of the lodge, and you must pardon our presumption for this seeming attempt at meddling in your affairs.

"Very truly, your friend and brother,

"JOHN ADAMS DRAKE."

When Vance received this letter he was inclined at first to resent the action of these friends, but decided to call Dr. Harley, and see if he had a hand in it. When the doctor came Vance gave him the letter to read.

"They have acted more promptly than I anticipated," he said.

"Then you had something to do with it?"

"Very little, I assure you. Permit me to say that I knew Drake was going to New York. I made the suggestion that if there was any way to get Flood's New York address, we might be able to learn something to our advantage. I say our, because you seem to have faith in Flood, and as was said at the Club the other night, you were the only man who had met the fellow, and had confidence in him. We were all of the opinion that he was the unscrupulous tool of an unscrupulous crew of financial pirates."

"You never lack words to make your meaning clear, doctor."

"I hope not, and furthermore, I hope it will be some time before language fails me entirely."

"My hope is intermingled with a prayer that your days may be long in the land you helped preserve."

"And upon a small portion of which I pay taxes, when you loan me the money."

We will not discuss the money part of the proposition—kindly tell me what this means?"

"I don't know what they have learned," the doctor said after a pause. "I know," he continued, "that Drake was wishing he had even an envelope with the usual business card upon it. A young man who was present — I need not name him — promised that the information would be forthcoming. Evidently he made good his promise and Drake is in possession of the same. I wish to emphasize what the letter says, that you pretend not to suspicion Flood. Give him all the rope he wants, he will wind himself up in it, together with a little assistance on our part."

"I suppose I should be grateful, but it makes me look like a two-year-old child."

"Nothing of the kind, Vance, nothing of the kind. It simply shows that you are less suspicious than we, and therefore, a more honorable man."

"That is very clever, but when shall I apply for a guardian?"

"Vance, I've been trying to break myself of swearing lately, but you'll start me again if you keep on. I'd counted on saying 'Popocataptl' when I wanted to allude to the sulphurous settlement."

"Why Popocataptl?" asked Vance.

"It was said to be a volcano when I went to school — I don't know what it is doing now — sort of warm in spots, I presume."

"That is a kind of Homeopathic dose."

"And then, instead of blurting out something that would give my old friend Abe Thomas the shivers, I'd say 'By Heck,' or something equally startling."

"We are disgressing, doctor. And now, seriously, while I believe I am able to cope with Flood, I appreciate the sentiment that calls forth these efforts."

"I am glad you do. You paid little attention to what I told you about Flood's visit to Abe Thomas. If he attempted to make trouble there and failed, it does not mean that he

will fail everywhere. I know men who have stock in the road that would have done Judas' job for half the money."

"That is putting it pretty strong, Doctor."

"It looks that way, but some of those old fellows will put a half dollar upon the mantle piece and fall down and worship it."

"Hyperbole is your long suit, my old friend."

"I am going to follow that fellow, Flood, wherever he goes and undo his work; see if I don't."

"I am very grateful, doctor. Perhaps you are right. I may have been too indifferent, but I shall keep watch now. By the way, I think your plan to follow Flood is a good one. Let me give you a cheque to cover expenses—"

"Cover — Popocataptl," he yelled, "accept money from you, and I am still in your debt. Why — Jehoiakim, Son of Josiah, but you'll get me riled, yet."

"Your new style of profanity is picturesque, but you probably mean the same old cuss words."

"I wonder if I do? I think not, though; I'm getting old enough to be a shining example to the community. I am going to prowl around Eden and vicinity the rest of the day, and it is time I was going."

While the doctor was looking at his watch and comparing the time with the large, old-fashioned clock in the office, Vance slipped a folded bill in his vest pocket.

The doctor made his first call at Abe Thomas' and learned that Flood had visited three of his neighbors and had them thoroughly frightened. They decided it would be wise to consult Lawyer Pedrick, and they were going to town the next day.

"Give me their names; I'll see them before I go home. That indescribable descendant of Nebuchadnezzar—" The doctor paused as he observed Thomas look around in a startled manner.

"You needn't look for Sarah Ann," he said, "she can take all my cuss words to Sunday School with her and get a nice little picture card for a prize."

They talked over the situation and decided that Thomas would assist in getting the men to visit Vance before they consulted Attorney Pedrick.

While the doctor was calming the disturbed farmers in the neighborhood of Eden, Mark Singleton was doing his full share of damage. He did not pretend to have anything to do with the road, as Flood had done. As is known, Flood pretended to be interested in equipping the road, but feared that conditions were not as he would like to see them. It was an unsafe venture as it stood at present, he explained, and thereby brought panic to the minds of several who had invested liberally, and who had paid part of the amount subscribed. It was understood that more money was expected when the road was in a certain degree of completion.

Singleton was going over his territory in the guise of a commission merchant who was looking up the possibilities in his line. He told the men whose names were on his list that he would do certain things to their advantage if the road should pass into other hands. He intimated that Vance was about swamped and that a majority of the stockholders would lose all they had invested.

His story created no little consternation and there seemed to be a possibility that a general movement against Vance would be made at once. Doubtless there would have been had it not been for Isaac Leedy. Dr. Harley and Leedy had been in the same Company in the war, and whether correct or not, Leedy was wont to tell a story of daring on the part of Harley, that saved, not only himself, but others from capture or death. The simple word of Dr. Harley was worth more than a sheaf of sworn affidavits from strangers.

Mark had been progressing admirably until he met Isaac. The farmer was driving a spirited team that did not seem to need the big blacksnake whip he carried in his hand, when Mark drove in at the open gate of the barn yard.

"You have a fine farm here, Mr. Leedy."

"I think pretty well of it," the farmer replied.

"It is almost too bad to have it cut up by that Interurban Railroad, if it goes down as I am afraid it will — that is, if an Eastern Syndicate does not take it off Vance's hands."

"Is that so?" asked the farmer. "You know Vance, do you?"

"Yes, I live in Lake City. I have just gone into the commission business, and I thought I would like to see this fine country and arrange to take a deal of your produce if you get it to town."

"What makes you think the road won't go through?"

"It is generally understood that Vance is on his last legs. If he accepts the offer of the Syndicate, it means that a lot of the stockholders will be 'holding the bag,' as the saying is."

"That certainly is news. I met an old fellow from up there the other day that told a different story."

"Of course I don't know who told you, and he may mean all right, but he's mistaken; however, it is no affair of mine," said Mark as he sprang out of the carriage.

"Do you happen to know Dr. Harley?" Leedy asked.

"I know his reputation."

"Pretty good, ain't it?"

"His reputation is a joke."

"How's that?"

"In the first place, he pretends to be a doctor, and in the second place he was never known to tell the truth more than twice in his life." Mark had not observed the gathering frown, or the nervous twitching of the farmer's lips.

"Did the old doc ever tell you that you was liable to fall heir to something you didn't want?"

"No. I would not place more reliance in him as a fortune teller than as a physician."

"I'm sorry he didn't, for you could have testified that he told the truth once.

"What do you mean?" asked Mark, sharply.

"I was just thinking if I wasn't a church member I'd like to see if my muscles would work yet like they used to. I think you're the all-firedest cheap sort of a liar that ever come on my farm. I'll give you a minute and a half to git out of here. You ain't fit to get down on your belly and lick Doc. John's boots."

"Look here, old fellow, this may be your farm and all that, but you called me a liar, and I'll—"

"What will you do? What will you do?" and each time he asked the question he brought the big black whip down across Mark's shoulders.

"Stop, stop, you've assaulted me, sir."

"I know it, I assaulted you and you insulted me."

"How did I insult you?"

"By lying and abusing the best man that ever walked over the Good Lord's footstool. I'm trying my best to be a Christian, but you got me agitated. If you called me all the names you could dig out of your ornery imagination I'd a just snickered, but when you begin on old Doc John, it's different."

"If you are through with me, I'll move on," said Mark as he sprang hurriedly in his conveyance.

"I'm through with you, praise the Lord," replied Leedy.

"I'm not through with you, though," cried Mark as he drove away.

"Stop, come back and let us get through with it like men. Let us settle it all here and now. I'm old enough to be your dad, but I'm offerin' praise and thanksgiving this minute that I'm not. I'll lay down the whip. If you can lick me with bare fists I'll take it without a whimper. There'll be no law suit when it's over as far as I'm concerned. I'll just go and resign as trustee of the Church."

"Resign, you — old fool," cried Mark.

"Tut, tut, don't you know the Good Book says, 'Whosoever calleth his brother a fool is in danger of hell fire.' That is about the only way I could say hell and be consistent," mused the farmer as he watched Mark drive away.

#### CHAPTER EIGHT.



S DRAKE was nearing the great City a gentleman entered the car, and as every seat in the Pullman was occupied, asked permission to share that which Drake had sole possession of. Naturally the courteous request was complied with. The

young man, for the new arrival was apparently a man about Drake's age, began in a casual manner to discuss the approaching campaign and its effect upon the business interests of the country. After some discussion, in which there was little disagreement, and each had learned the occupation to which they were devoting their time and attention, Drake remarked: "If I understood you correctly, you are connected with a manufactury that equips Electric railroads, Urban and Interurban?"

"Yes, our establishment is one of the most complete, and one of the largest in the country. Naturally," continued the stranger, "we are particularly interested in the coming election."

"Politics interests me less, personally, than most men in my profession. Many men in my line devote more time to politics than to law, and many a good lawyer is spoiled to make an indifferent politician," said Drake, good humoredly.

"Ohio demonstrated not many years ago that a capitalist, a man of affairs, an up and up business man, could make a great politician," was the reply.

"Oh, yes, but Ohio is wont to lay claim to all kinds of greatness. Her specialty for many years now has been to

impress upon other states the futility of bothering with National affairs—the idea is, just leave it to Ohio."

"Perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea," laughingly replied the stranger.

"Just now I'm more interested in a man engaged in your line of business, than I am in politicians," replied Drake.

"Yes? As I am fairly familiar with all work in my line, and I could be of any service to you, I beg you may be free to ask me."

"You may have heard of Lake City. We think it should have a very conspicuous place on the map, especially now, that we have almost completed an Interurban line of railway, occupied by no line of railway, steam or trolley," said Drake.

"It is somewhat strange that we have not heard of it. The Great Northern Electric Company is usually next, as the saying is, to all projects of that kind," replied the stranger.

"The Great Northern, did you say?" Drake's manner indicated more than a mere idle question.

"My card will explain my position in the Great Northern Company."

Drake read: "Foxhall Standhope, Asst. Secretary, Great Northern Electric Company, New York and Boston."

"This is not only peculiar, but somewhat interesting," said the attorney, when he had placed the card in his pocket. "It is, at least, a part of my business in New York to find out all I can about a man who claims to represent your Company, and who is now in Lake City."

"Can you give me his name?"

"Yes, he calls himself Cyrus Flood."

"I cannot understand it. I am familiar with the names of all connected with our establishment, holding an important position, such as you must realize that to be," replied Stanhope.

"I am not at all surprised that you have never heard of Cyrus Flood. I possess information that leads me to believe that he represents the Overland Syndicate of New York. It is a true saying 'that corporations have no souls,' but this one has little sense of honor, as well. Of course the powerful capitalist preys upon the weaker, but, in this particular case the methods used are so contemptible that without consulting the man at the head of the enterprise, Wilberton Vance, my personal friend, I have taken it upon myself to investigate this man Flood. He came to Lake City, pretending to represent the Great Northern Electric Company, and while he has partly succeeded in making Vance believe he is what he represents himself to be, I have information that forces me to conclude that he is connected with an unscrupulous set of fellows possessing great capital, doubtless, under the name of the Overland Syndicate."

"And what is this Syndicate attempting to do?" asked Standhope.

Drake then explained what has already been told, and how some of the country stockholders became alarmed because of the reports Flood was circulating.

Standhope then announced that he would communicate with headquarters in relation to Flood, and if Drake thought it wise he would go to Lake City at once and if everything was satisfactory take up the matter of equipping the route.

"I am of the opinion that it would be an excellent move. Your presence there will unmask Flood, and if I succeed in another line of investigation the happiness, possibly the honor, of an estimable young woman may be the result of it. I earnestly hope that I may meet you in our little city and together rid Lake City of the presence of Cyrus Flood," said Drake.

"If nothing prevents I will start for your city tomorrow," was the reply.

The incidental meeting of Mr. Standhope seemed to Drake a harbinger of good luck. If he could succeed in finding the person he had in mind, the troubles of Wilberton Vance, so far as Flood was concerned, would be at an end. The reputation of an orphan was at stake. "Was it possible," he thought, "that she might already be his victim?"

When Drake had registered at the palatial hotel, where he was accustomed to stop when in New York, he went at once to the room assigned, where he made a copy of a torn letter he had brought with him. It was not difficult to find the street and number. The house in front of which the cab stopped was of the shabby genteel order. The street as well as the house had seen better days.

In answer to his vigorous ring, a woman whose tawdry dress seemed in perfect keeping with the place, came with slip-shod step to the door.

"I wish to speak with Mrs. Flood," he said.

"I'll see if she is in," was the reply.

He was ushered into the reception hall, as the woman was pleased to term it, and soon a young woman on whose face there were lines that only trouble wrought made her appearance.

"Is this Mrs. Cyrus Flood?" he asked.

"I am Mrs. Flood, so called. In reality I am Mrs. Kennedy Woodward, at least that is the name my husband bore when we were married."

"May I ask if Flood is an alias?"

"Are you a detective?"

"I am not — I am an attorney."

"What does he want of me now? Has he not brought me sorrow enough without sending a lawyer to bring additional trouble?"

Drake realized that she believed him an emissary of the man she called husband, and for the present it might be well

that she should not be enlightened, unless she put the question to him directly. He would not misrepresent matters—he could not afford to lie—therefore, he said: "Perhaps it would be well to hear your story. I pledge you my honor as a man to take no advantage of any statement you may make to do you injury. I am aware of his plans and purposes, and it might be well, at least for you, to tell me all."

"I will tell you. You gave me your word of honor as a man, and I will trust you, even if you are his attorney. I will say further, there is little more that you can do than he has already done to make my life a wreck, even if you wished," she replied.

"There is no question then that there was a marriage ceremony?"

"Does he try to deny that?"

"Not to me, at least." Drake began to feel that duplicity was not to his liking, even though he was seeking to save the honor of a daughter of an Elk. "You must know, however, that there is another woman in the case."

"I am well aware of that. He wrote me frankly that he cared for me no longer. That he loved a rich girl, and she would marry him, but he dared not risk the crime of bigamy, for she had powerful friends. He asked me to get a divorce for desertion, and he would give me \$1,000.00. If I refused I should never hear from him again. He took the name of Cyrus Flood when he became identified with a syndicate or corporation that sent him to Lake City."

"Have you a marriage certificate or any proof that you and he were married?"

"I have."

"May I see it?"

"No. You will take it away from me. That gone, I am utterly unprotected. You appear to be a gentleman, but I cannot trust you," she replied with deep earnestness.

"I will be as frank with you as you have been with me, and when I have told you all, I think you will trust me. Cyrus Flood, as he calls himself, has come between a young man of probity and honor — a friend, a brother in a sense, and a young woman of excellent family - an orphan. She is a beautiful girl: He has represented himself as a single man, and she, I am grieved to say, seems to be infatuated with him. His business in Lake City is not particularly creditable to him, although the law cannot interfere. I am not his attorney as you inferred. You assumed that I was, and until this moment I have not sought to deny it. I told you I would take no advantage of your statement to me. I say to you now, I will not, but I appeal to you as a woman worthy of a more loyal husband to help me save a pure young girl who has never wronged you in thought because she knows not of your existence, nor would she wrong you in deed did she know the truth. She would spurn Cyrus Flood - would drive him from her presence if she knew - will you not help me?"

"Tell me how?" she replied, calmly.

"Give me proof of your marriage, and come with me to Lake City."

"I will bring you the proof."

She was absent from the room but a few moments, and when he had examined the certificate, he said: "Now will you accompany me to Lake City?"

"How can I? I was forced to leave apartments that were comfortable, and come to this — but it is shelter. Soon I shall be driven from here. My money is almost gone, and he will not send me more unless I consent to set him free." A mist was gathering in her eyes.

"If I can convince you that I am all I claim to be — a gentleman — will you come, or do you fear to meet him face to face?"

"To meet him? No. But to face poverty and starvation, yes." Her eyes sought his unflinchingly.

"There is a gentleman in this city," he replied, "whom you must know, at least by reputation. No man in my profession stands higher. He is known throughout this entire United States. If you will meet this eminent man and hear him say, either in my presence or to you alone, that all I promised you will be fulfilled, will you come?"

"What do you promise me?"

"I promise you protection. I promise you friends and an honorable position, and I further promise that you will receive the thousand dollars Flood had promised — a promise he will never keep."

"What am I to do?"

"Go with me, as I have said, and when I shall arrange the time and place meet your husband, and if he attempts to deny your claim upon him produce these proofs," said Drake.

"Who is this eminent gentleman of whom you speak?"

When Drake had named him—a man familiar to the country, an honored name—she stared at him as if it was beyond belief. "And you know him?"

"My father, Judge Absalom Drake, and he are friends—warm, devoted friends."

"He would not let a woman be betrayed, even if you care to, and I won't believe you wish to wrong me."

"Then let us go," he said.

# CHAPTER NINE.

T

HE suburban residence of Wilberton Vance was one of the handsomest, if not the most pretentious, in Lake City. The wide lawn, a mass of odorous flowers, lined the walled grounds, while all about were trees and shrubs and climbing roses. Inside

the lighted mansion, Vance sat alone.

Harold Brady was there, but he and Jean had strolled into the moonlight. The white, full moon lighted the beautiful grounds save here and there where the tree shadows were deep and dark. Eleanor Clay came from her apartment, and looking out from the wide circling veranda, called: "Jean, where are you, Jean?"

To Vance the call was like a half forgotten melody. A strain from a sweet old song, that came wandering back from other days. The world is wont to sneer at the new-born love in the soul of a widower. She, who had passed away while Jean was yet a little girl, was not forgotten. He could not forget. He had been thinking of her that moment, and the voice of Jean's friend was like the voice that was hushed.

In a moment he was by her side, Jean's friend, the guest in his home.

"Has that daughter of mine deserted you?" he asked.

"I imagine she is hiding from me in the shrubbery yon-der."

"If she is, she is not alone."

"For the moment I had forgotten Mr. Brady," she laughingly replied.

"Mr. Brady never forgets his social obligations. If Jean and her 'Melancholy Dane,' as she calls him at times, are lurking in the shadows, I am tempted to ask that I be permitted to enjoy the moolight with you."

"Neither the moonlight nor the lawn is mine," Mr. Vance." He looked at her sharply, but did not observe the ghost of a roguish smile that accompanied her peculiar reply.

"That is a mystifying answer, and might mean if either or both were yours that you preferred the society of your thoughts."

"Is not that conclusion unjust to both of us?"

"I confess I hope it is," Vance replied, with an attempt at gayety he did not feel. The moon shone upon the face of the fair young woman leaning carelessly upon the great round pillars of the veranda, and he wondered as he glanced at her if all went well with him in his business venture — that dream of his — the dream that was growing misty and vaguely dark even then — if she would ever be a part of the lovely scene his vision rested upon. Presently he added: "I hope Jean is making your visit pleasant."

"I have enjoyed every moment of it."

"It is not my desire to appear neglectful of my daughter's guests, but you may have observed that I am a busy man."

"It is splendid to be able to carry on an enterprise that all the city is interested in," she replied.

"It has its pleasures and allurements, but we sometimes tremble at the thought of failure."

"Resolute men seldom fail."

"Circumstances sometimes crush the bravest," he replied. "I shall not annoy you by discussing my business affairs, but I am reaching a crisis in my work. I sometimes pause and ask myself whether it is failure at the end. It is not of myself I am thinking, but of Jean. I can gather myself together

after a fashion, but Jean would suffer most. I should not like to see the joyous light die out from her eyes because of failure."

"Why speak of failure, Mr. Vance?"

"As I was about to complete the work I have given my fortune and best endeavors to accomplish there came into our midst this man Cyrus Flood, of whom you have heard, and he may cause no little trouble, possibly failure."

"Is he so powerful?" she asked.

"That remains to be seen, but legal complications which he is endeavoring to bring about, may cause irreparable injury. A friend in New York telegraphed me late this afternoon to have trusted men follow his every footstep."

Vance was about to speak of Flood's influence upon Norma Lane, of her indifference toward her friends generally, and Neil Dare in particular, when Jean and Harold joined them.

"Here you are, getting sentimental in the moonlight, I venture," said Jean.

"Someone must entertain your guests while you run about," replied her father.

"I hope it was not a serious task. Now I have cares that might cause an Indian to weep."

"I had not the faintest idea you had a care in the world," remarked Eleanor.

"Gaze on that countenance," and Jean pointed her finger at the luckless Harold. "The knight of the rueful countenance number two. I am undecided which would be best for him — Christian Science or paragoric."

"Jean, you are merciless," interrupted Eleanor.

"Talk of the merciless savage, with his tomahawk—" and Harold was about to open the flood gates of his oratory. This Jean prevented by saying: "Which one of us, if left to choose the manner of execution would not prefer the tomahawk to 'tommyrot?'"

"There you go again. Spare us the agony of another quarrel, or if you must, go and pour out your troubles to the cast iron dogs by the gateway," said Vance.

"We will do nothing of the kind — we will go out there to the rustic seat on the lawn and be perfectly lovely with each other."

"Amen," said Harold, devoutly, as he followed his fair inquisitor.

Even Harold was surprised at the attention she gave him as he outlined his new offer on the paper. He had been promoted and his salary increased and indications were that he would soon be made managing editor.

"And then, Jean" — he paused as if he feared to say more. "What is it, Harold?"

"When that time comes, and it is not far away, I shall come to you and say—"

At that moment Vance called to him: "By the way, Harold, did you see Flood today?"

"Papa, if I used slang I would say that you have a most disagreeable habit of 'butting in' occasionally."

"But I have something important to discuss with him, and you ladies will excuse us, won't you?"

As Harold turned to leave Jean called to him: "Don't forget what you were going to say."

Jean knew quite as well as Harold what he was about to say. The story of his devotion was not new to her, but she never permitted him to ask the question bluntly: "Jean, will you marry me?"

She was quite certain she wanted him to ask that question sometime, but the time had not arrived when she cared to be bound by a promise. She was thinking of this as Eleanor came and sat beside her on the rustic seat. "I do not believe," she said, "that I will offer you the traditional penny for your thoughts — I read them."

"I wonder if you can? Did you find my papa interesting?"

"Very, I'm sure."

"I was rather interested in a story Harold was telling," said Jean, and there was a dreamy, absent expression in the wide, hazel eyes. Perhaps it was the story her eyes were telling that led Eleanor to say: "At last, Jean, you are beginning to be sensible."

"I wonder if I ever shall be? I have been very rude to poor Harold, and he is the dearest boy in the world. Some day I will be in the mood to listen to him tell a very, very old story, but one as sweet as when it was new."

"Doubtless, doubtless," Eleanor replied.

"You know such a story is ever interesting when the right man tells it. Perhaps I am not quite myself tonight. I know papa is in trouble, and I know that being with you has seemed to make him forget it. Until Harold came into my life he was everything to me, father, brother, chum—everything but mother. I was only ten years old when I saw his tears rain down on the unanswering face of my mother; it seems to me that his love for me since that hour is like the love of the Infinite One. I will not leave him until some one comes. Eleanor, I wish that some one was you."

"Jean, dear, you cannot mean what you are saying — why, he——"

"Do not say it — I know — you were about to say that he was so many years your senior, you could not learn to care for him."

"My best girl friend, my dear Jean, you humiliate me your father does not care for me—he has never hinted such a thing. What would you have me do, dear?"

"I will tell you. Wait, just wait, and then say yes. It is natural, it is what sooner or later I must expect, that some

woman will be his wife. Why would he not love one as sweet and desirable as you, Eleanor?"

"Would it not be well to wait until he asks me, dear?"

"Well, perhaps it would," and the girls laughed merrily. Before they could introduce a theme that might lead them back to that which left Eleanor's cheeks aglow, Neil Dare stood before them.

"I do not know, Jean, just why I came — I had to, I guess — I met them a while ago. Norma would not look toward me, and he sneered as usual. I never felt so much like killing any creature, even a wild beast, as that man," and Neil stood with clenched fists as though his enemy was before him.

"Neil, papa is the guardian of Norma and Marion. I love little Marion as if she were my own sister, and once I loved Norma. Now I despise her. The girls are telling cruel, awful stories about her—stories I would not let them tell me, though they tried to, but I do not care to recognize her again. I know how you love her, pardon my plain speech, and I know, too, that it is not easy to forget. It is not easy to kill such affection as yours even though the object is unworthy. I cannot cheer or comfort you. Take your love for Norma Lane and strangle it. Strangle it as you would a beast that had sought to harm you."

"Perhaps some day I may forget, but not now. Where is your papa, Jean? There is nothing special to say — nothing in the way of news, but some way I feel better when I am with him."

Harold came hurriedly from his conference with Vance, and seeing Neil, exclaimed: "Just the man we want. Come, the auto will be here in a moment, the Western Union has phoned that an important message has come, and asks if they shall deliver it tonight. We will get Dr. Harley and come back at once."

"Is it bad news, Harold?" Jean asked, anxiously.

"We don't know, but believe it may turn out to be good news."

The machine had not passed out of hearing until a cab came rapidly down the carriage road and a young man approached the rustic seat where the girls were yet wondering what all the hurry and excitement of the evening meant.

"I am told," said the stranger, "that Mr. Vance is at home, and if he is not engaged I would consider it a favor if

I could see him, if even for a few minutes."

"Come with me," said Jean. When they reached the veranda, Mr. Vance met them. "This gentleman wishes to see you, papa."

"Permit me to introduce myself, Mr. Vance. I am Assistant Secretary of the Great Northern Electric Company, Foxhall Standhope."

"Be seated, Mr. Standhope." The stranger, while not anticipating effusiveness, noted the flush of annoyance, and realized at once that Mr. Vance believed him an associate of Flood.

"I observe by your manner, Mr. Vance, that you doubtless believe me in league with one Cyrus Flood, who pretends to represent our Company. I have heard of him. I met a friend of yours on the train as we were both on our way to New York. I need not now enter into details, how Mr. Drake came to tell me about the situation here. I arrived in this city about an hour ago. I believed it wise to see you at once, that I may join with you in circumverting Flood."

"Mr. Standhope, you will pardon my seemingly discourteous reception, but when you mentioned the name of your Company I most naturally associated you with the man I have every reason to believe is a rascal."

"He is doubtless what you say he is, and I hasten to assure you that he never was connected with our Company."

"I know you will believe me when I say that I can never more heartily welcome an unexpected guest. I had begun to fear this man Flood. He was undermining my credit, and I feared that any day he might induce some of the stockholders to begin litigation."

The gentleman then reviewed the entire situation. Standhope told of his meeting Drake, and how he promised the young attorney that he would come to Lake City at once, if business permitted. Now that he was on the ground they would not only circumvent Flood but would have the Company he was associated with proceed at once to equip the road.

"Come. you must meet my daughter and her friend, Miss Clay," said Vance. He was himself once more. He saw victory ahead. Flood must fight him in the open now. He was pleased to think that he had sent for Dr. Harley. The doctor would go over the line of the road and tell the story of Flood's duplicity.

When Standhope was presented to the ladies, Jean saw at a glance the changed expression upon the face of her father.

"Mr. Standhope, you have brought good news to us, as I read the story here," and she fondly stroked the cheeks of the father she loved so dearly.

"He did bring good news, daughter. I see daylight again."

"And Eleanor and I see only the light of the inconstant moon."

"The 'inconstant moon,' as you are pleased to say, is smiling now on a most lovely scene. Let us take the beauty of this night, with its wealth of fragrance from the flowers that will not sleep — the flowers that smile upon each other through all the lighted night as a sign that right will triumph," said Standhope.

"Mr. Standhope," said Jean, "were you at Yale?"

"Yes."

"Then I know you."

"Have we met before and I failed to remember you?"

"We never met, but some one will be here soon — I will not tell you — we will wait and see if you know each other."

The discordant "honk," "honk," of the machine was heard in the distance.

"The boys are coming," said Vance.

"They are coming at a mad pace, too," added Jean.

In a moment there was only the chaffeur left — the doctor led the way, waving in his hand a letter. "Vive le docteur," shouted Harold.

"That voice, I have heard it before," and Standhope turned to Jean, inquiringly.

The doctor was too excited to observe the stranger, and cried: "Vance, I'm richer than old—old—what's his name?"

"Creosote," suggested Harold.

"You must have the toothache, young man — well, I'm rich anyway — when I get it. They have found all kinds of oil on my farm—"

"Hair oil and everything," interrupted Harold.

"I'm offered fifty thousand dollars for it."

"And your farm is near that new field in—" and before Vance could finish—"right in the center of it," cried the doctor. "I just come to tell you so I can wire tonight."

"Don't take it," commented Vance.

"Why General Jim Jehosephat, Vance, I counted on joining the lodge."

The group had not noticed that Aunt Louise had joined them.

"Doctor," she said unctuously — "doctor, are you an oil man?"

"I am reeking in oil, Madame. I'm an octopus."

### CHAPTER TEN.



HEN the excitement caused by the announcement of the fortune that had come to the doctor had lulled, Vance opened the dispatch Neil had given him. He read it and re-read it; then he replaced the message in the envelope. Jean asked if it

was of interest to all, or merely a matter of business.

"It is business," he replied, "and it interests all of us," but we will discuss it later. Neil, you had best accompany Tom, I am sending for Norma."

Neil asked permission to say a word to him privately, and when they were alone explained the great embarrassment that would be his if he attempted to talk to Norma.

"She will not recognize me. She will not speak to me. I wish to please you in all things, but I beg of you do not impose that duty upon me."

"She refuses to recognize you, does she? Well, she will be glad enough to do so before many days or I miss my guess."

"Harold will go, I'm sure — he understands the situation — or perhaps the doctor——"

"I could not think of sending the doctor anywhere tonight, he is too much excited, and I don't blame him. Call Harold, I must see Norma tonight."

Harold readily agreed to go, although deeply interested in talking over Yale days with Standhope. By this time the car was waiting and as he hurried to explain to Jean why he must go down to the city again, that young lady with decided emphasis said: "You shall not go." "Your father asked me, how can I refuse?"

"Papa, are you sending Harold to bring Norma Lane here?"

"I have asked him because Neil cannot go, under the circumstances."

" I beg of you not to bring that girl here."

"Jean—" there was seldom a note of impatience in his voice when addressing his daughter, but now she realized that he was nearer being angry with her than ever before.

"Jean, I'm surprised at your language. You know my relationship, you know that her father—"

"I know all that," she interrupted. "Her father was a good man. I cannot say his eldest daughter is an honor to him."

"Do you wish to offend me, my daughter?"

"I do not, but she is the talk of the town. I hope you will not expect me to recognize her."

"You have been listening to gossip, my child," he said, more gently, "and this gossip will end ere long. I am sending for her to save her from taking a step that she may regret all her life. Tell Marion to come with her sister, Harold, and waste no time."

"Come, Eleanor, the gentlemen will excuse us for the present, at least," Jean said, as she and Eleanor returned to the house.

"And now, gentlemen, for a conference," said Vance. "Doctor, if you will forget your oil land for a while, I'll take up the matter with you later. At present I hope you will help me."

"I'll stay with you, Vance, if I have to sell the farm for \$1.75 an acre."

"They will double the offer tomorrow."

"And then what?"

"' 'A bird in the hand,' you know."

"If I ever get a hundred thousand dollar bird in my hand I'll choke it to death."

"You might get double that amount," said Standhope, "and you might not get \$5,000 in a week from now. There is is no telling what the Standard may do."

There was a merry twinkle in the doctor's eyes, as he said: "For a day or two I can imitate old Sim Allen, that I used to know. He lived neighbor, he claimed, with Lincoln in Illinois, and helped him split rails. Talking about it he would always say: 'Me and Abe,' did so and so, and I can say, 'Me and John D.' will whoop things up one of these 'days."

"Doctor, I know how deeply you are interested in the proposition made you, and yet I must ask you to do something for me. The arrival of Mr. Standhope has put a new phase on affairs. I confess that today I began to fear that Flood would work great harm if not absolute ruin to the enterprise that means much to many of us. The telegram I received just now, while not explicit, has prompted me to send for Norma. The message says: 'Keep close watch upon Norma. They may elope. Will have Flood cornered soon.' Mr. Standhope will be here until everything is safe. Our Company is in position to secure the Great Northern Electric Company, and in turn that institution will complete every detail. There is danger, however, even yet, that Flood may succeed in buying the stock of certain men through whose lands the line passes, on condition that they will ask for an injunction. Mr. Standhope agrees to accompany you over such portion of the road as seems in the most danger. He and you can make it clear to them that Flood is a fraud and that every promise I have made them will be fulfilled."

"As I said, I am at your disposal," replied the doctor.

"In regard to your offer, doctor, if you will make me your agent with power to act, I will agree to get double the amount

you have been offered, or within one year I will give you fifty thousand myself for your farm. I must remain in the city; you, more than any other man, can deal successfully with these frightened stockholders. If my proposition seems fair, make over to me power of attorney in the morning, or tonight, and get away early tomorrow."

When Harold arrived with Norma and Marion, Vance called Jean and asked her to entertain Marion while he and Norma were engaged, as the gentlemen were in the billiard room smoking.

"We will go to the library, Norma," he said. Vance observed that Norma seemed exceedingly nervous, if not frightened. While her father's friend had been kind toward her always, kind and ever courteous, he had never shown her the affection he had Marion, and secretly Norma resented this seeming partiality. Marion was no longer a child, she thought, and she was as much entitled to his consideration as her sister. She could not complain that she had been treated unkindly. Vance was ever considerate with her, but there was a fondness in his manner for Marion that she wished might have been hers as well. "I love that man," she would say to herself, "love him as I would my father, but he holds me away from him. Why does he? Does he not see that I have wanted to come to him as a daughter might to the father who loved her."

"Take that easy chair, Norma; we have something to discuss that may be unpleasant, and may take some time, so we will take such physical comfort as offers."

"Mr. Vance, you have never liked me as you have Marion," said Norma. "It is true she was quite a little girl when you took charge of us, but you cannot know how often I have wished that you would speak as tenderly to me as you have unvaryingly spoken to her. You have said that our

interview may be unpleasant, I wish you to know my feelings toward you."

"My dear Norma, I never felt that Marion was more dear to me than you. You will never know how deeply I feel my inadequateness to live up to a promise to my dear friend, your father. There never was a time for many months after his death, when on meeting you and Marion, I did not want to put my arms about you and call you my own as I do Jean. The world — propriety — prevented. The public would have condemned me, would have been more unkind than it is now to you, had I given expression to all my heart prompted; and that brings me to the question we are here to discuss."

"You mean Mr. Flood, of course?"

"Yes, we must talk about Mr. Flood."

"Naturally, you must feel, Mr. Vance, that I have treated Neil badly. He is associated with you — your employe — I mean."

"Not only an employe, but my friend," he replied with much feeling.

"I may be frank with you, Mr. Vance. Neil asked me to marry him. I do not believe I promised, but I did not say no. I was certain that I cared for him, but was not sure of myself. Then Mr. Flood came — we met, and it seemed to me there was but one person then that could make me happy."

"Will you tell me as a friend — for I am your friend, Norma — as I remember the words of your dying father I could not be other than your friend; will you tell me how you became acquainted with Flood?"

"I will tell you all there is to tell. You remember Mark Singleton. He was once a gentleman, at least, many of us thought so. Then he became a drunkard and worse, and naturally every girl that had respect for herself shunned him. One afternoon I was going to the Casino. I was alone. Mark came toward me — planted himself in front of me, and tried

to detain me. I ordered him to let me pass. He looked into my face and made some sneering comment. What I said to him I do not remember, but he attempted to kiss me. A messenger boy passed at that moment, and I asked him to send the officer to me at once. In a moment a stranger came quickly to my side and, grasping the situation, dashed Singleton aside and accompanied me to the Casino. Thus we became acquainted, and since that time he has treated me with the utmost consideration.

Vance did not reply for some time. Finally he asked: "Did you know, Norma, that Mark Singleton is working for Flood?"

"That seems incredible."

"Nevertheless it is true. Do you know what Mr. Flood's business in Lake City is, Norma?"

"He is here, he said, 'to equip the new road' — that he and you have about concluded the business that brought him here."

"You would be surprised, Norma, to learn that he is here to ruin me financially."

"I would be much surprised if that was true, and if you will pardon me for speaking plainly, I must say, I do not believe it."

"Norma Lane, it is true. I have absolute proof."

"Doctor Harley and Neil hate Mr. Flood, though why the doctor interferes is more than I can fathom," she replied bitterly.

"It is true. I heard it first from the doctor-"

"I thought so," she interrupted.

"As I was saying," Vance continued imperturbably, "I heard it first from the doctor. I was incredulous, too, but was forced to investigate, and I can bring you, if it were necessary, a dozen men whom he and Mark Singleton have urged to break with me and get the road into the Courts. Un-

less a speedy termination could be arrived at, ruin might be the result. It was not Flood's efforts to ruin me that I wished to consider. What I propose to ask you concerns your future happiness, and as I said a moment ago, it is as your friend I ask these questions. Has Flood asked you to marry him?"

"Do you consider that question quite fair to me?"

"It looks blunt and discourteous, I admit, but it is not through idle curiosity, or an attempt to interfere with you. It does mean, however, that you may be a victim of an unscrupulous fellow——"

"If I consider him worthy of my confidence, do you think, Mr. Vance, that innuendoes would change that confidence?"

"Unfortunately that blind confidence women have for men that appeal to them makes their danger all the greater. You were not aware, and possibly will not believe, even since I have offered to prove to you that the man who came pretending to be the representative of a great manufacturing establishment is not connected therewith, and that he is using that simply as a 'blind' to work disaster and ruin to me."

"Do you really believe that, Mr. Vance?"

"I have proof for that, also."

"I am not disputing your word, but I am sure you have been misinformed."

"If I dared trust you, Norma, I would prove all that I have asserted."

"Have I fallen so far in your esteem that you cannot trust me?"

"The time has not yet arrived when he shall be exposed. Exposed he surely will be, and it is my earnest desire that you will not in any way share in the humiliation. In less than five minutes I could prove to you that Flood never was connected with The Great Northern Electric Company, a representative of which he claims to be."

"Then why not give me the proof?"

"Because you would tell him, even if you promised me you would not." He saw her color deeply, and in her eyes there was the glitter of anger. "Do not think, I beg of you, that I believe you would stoop to falsehood, but you are a woman — you could not help it — that is all. But we are wasting time on my part of this unhappy affair. Let us turn to something of more vital importance to you."

"That is useless. When it is clear to my mind that Mr. Flood is seeking to bring disaster to a man whose affection I have yearned for — bring ruin, as you have said, to my dear, dead father's most loyal and loving friend, then I will show him what a woman's scorn is; then I show you what loyalty to a precious memory is; even though I am a girl you will not trust."

"Daughter of my dear friend, I never have come so near loving you as my child, as at this moment. Now let me read you part of a telegram received this evening. It is from New York and says: 'Keep close watch upon Norma; they may elope.'"

"May I ask what that means?"

"It means more than you can guess. It means more than I care to tell you. It means the keeping of a vow. It means that a solemn obligation is being observed to the letter. That message is from a young man whom you know and respect. A young man of whom it can be said: 'None stand higher in our social life than he.' Upon his own volition—I being absolutely unaware of his intentions until he was gone, he went to save you from a mistake—an unconscious or unintentional mistake, but one that might cast a blight upon your life. You may think that Neil has had something to do with all this. He has not. He has been bearing up under the blow that has fallen upon him as bravely and as manfully as he can. He utters not complaint. He keeps his grief to himself. It is not, I know, as wicked for you to desert him

unwedded as you are, as though a solemn vow had bound you, and yet his anguish is as keen as though he had held you in his arms and called you wife. I do not seek to hide from you the fact that it would have pleased me greatly to have seen you Neil Dare's wife. Whether that shall be or not is no affair of mine. I am not here to plead his cause, dearly as I might wish to, but when this gentleman hastened to the great city to help untangle the threads of fate in which you are being enmeshed, it means much to you. You may wonder why this apparent interference in an affair you may deem your own, but he and I could not face your father in the world that lies beyond, if we did not try to shield you from every harm."

"What do you wish me to do?"

"I ask that you make no rash resolve to run away with Cyrus Flood."

"I do not anticipate taking such a step. He has asked me to be his wife. You asked me that question plainly and I evaded it. Now I answer it. When I know that he has the right to claim me I may go, if he has been honest with you. If he has not, you have my promise. I have taken no obligation, I have made no promise, but I make it now to you. I will never marry a man who cannot look you in the face and say: 'I never sought to wrong you.' I have heard it intimated that some think me unworthy of recognition by good people. If that were true I would not be here tonight. Force alone would have brought me. If I could not look fearlessly into your eyes, I should go down to the night at once, despised and pitied."

"Nobly said, my girl. My mind is at rest. All will be right one of these days," he said, and in his voice there was a world of tenderness. "Marion will be wondering what is keeping us. But, first, let me revert to what you said about Dr. Harley. You felt that for some reason he was.

meddling in your affairs. Do not forget that the doctor is your true friend. You might insult him, might treat him with contumely, but through it all he would be your friend."

"On account of his strange affection for Marion?" Norma asked.

"No. It began before you were born. Your grandfather saved the life of the doctor upon the battlefield. They were brave men, both of them, and the doctor would give his life, if need be, for you as well as for Marion. He is one of God's noblemen, and I wish you to go home tonight feeling that the brave, old man would stop at nothing short of dishonor to keep your name as spotless as I deem it — as spotless as it is now."

As they came from the library Jean met them. It was a pitiless stare that Norma met, and with unflinching gaze she returned it. Vance was not ready to believe that Jean would show such marked discourtesy in her father's house and to one she had known all her life.

"Jean," he exclaimed, indignantly, "Jean, you insult your father when you insult his guest. Norma Lane is worthy of my affection and my daughter's trust."

"No one questions your motives, my father, but you don't know—"

"I do know - I know it all."

Norma, proudly erect, showed no trace of guilt, no sign of shame. But when Jean had said to her father, "You don't know," she grew white as the hoar frost and the glitter in her eyes so markedly beautiful when in repose was as the glitter of the snow in winter sun. She opened her lips as if to speak, but closed them quickly. If a look could have killed, Jean would have been silent forever.

"Norma has earned no insult, and is not in need of pity," Vance continued sternly.

Jean started to leave them, scorn upon her lips, contempt in her eyes.

"Stop," he thundered, "recognize my guest."

"I bow to your command. Miss Lane, good evening."



## CHAPTER ELEVEN.



ARK SINGLETON finally found one of the stockholders, a man that had invested liberally, and who had cheerfully given the right of way through a portion of his property, in a mood to listen to him.

It was not always possible to follow country roads, and in such cases the right of way through farms was secured. So desirous were the people living alongside the proposed line that little trouble was experienced in arranging for the same. The opportunity for a better market, and a speedy manner of reaching the City in the winter season, prompted universal enthusiasm in the project.

Simon Buchwalter, a man of convivial habits, was inclined to do even more than was expected of him, because he saw in imagination many an unroarious hour in Lake City, where he could laugh at the winter winds when they howled, and the storms that formerly beat about him as he made the long ride over rough roads. Rarely did he consider the moneymaking advantage of the road; it was always the ease with which he could reach the spot where the coarse jest and the hot punch could be found that appealed to him.

Mark was in one of the small villages on the route and there met Simon, who was discoursing to a group of kindred spirits upon the gloom that ever pervaded — from his viewpoint — a village where the thirsty continue to thirst, and where the bibulous could only babble of the gilded parlors of Bacchus.

Then he alluded to the new road, which, when completed, would bear them quickly to Lake City. "I give 'em the right of way an' I give 'em a cool thousand besides. Some day I expect to git that thousand back ,an' when I do I'll blow half of it a ridin' to Lake City when the crops ain't pesterin' me."

Mark fixed upon Simon as his man. He carried in the carriage a few bottles which he had labeled "Tidings of Comfort."

As soon as he could secure the attention of Simon, he said: "I am a stranger to you, and I am from Lake City. I have some information on the subject you were talking about that may interest you. I have, also, something in the carriage there that will hit the spot, if you care to try it."

"Honest Injin, hev you?" Simon's tongue was moistening his lips in anticipation.

"Excuse yourself to your friends and get in with me. I haven't enough for that bunch."

"I guess I got time to show you the place," and Simon winked fast and often. "Boy's, I'm goin' to show this stranger a farm down here a ways, an' I'll be back soon."

When they were out of the village Mark stopped under a wide spreading maple and produced the bottle he had named "Tidings of Comfort," a whiskey glass and a siphon of seltzer.

"Got a whole bar with you, ain't you? You are certainly my kind of a missionary. What is that writin' on the bottle. I ain't got my specks. 'Tidings of Comfort,' hey? Well, ef that ain't glad tidens I don't want a cent. My wife allus invites the Presidin' Elder to our house Camp Meetin' times an' feeds him chicken till she has to sew the buttons on his vest, but by thunder you can come an' stay a week. I'll feed you on three kinds of chicken meat, turkey, chicken an' duck."

Mark had not been sparing of the "tidings," and Simon was soon in a receptive mood. Then he told the story concerning the commission business, and how the road was about to go under, because the men at the head of it had been foolishly extravagant. He told also how he happened to know a man who could save the day — who could build the road if he got enough stock at a low figure.

"By thunder, I want the road built. I won't always hev you here."

"If I had you in Lake City I would put you next to a man that could save your thousand for you."

"You don't sha?" Simon's tongue was growing unmanageable.

"I am going back to Lake City tomorrow. I will be there tomorrow evening. Why can't you meet me at the Wilson House at noon the next day — that is Thursday — say Thursday noon?"

"All right, hic; come an' shay all night at my house."

Mark declined. He did not know what manner of woman Mrs. Buchwater might be. He exacted a promise, however, that Simon should meet him at Lake City Thursday.

"We will have dinner together at the Wilson House."

"An' shum more ti — tide — tidings?" asked Simon.

"We will have the best money can buy," replied Mark.

"I will git breakfas' at home an' dinner with you, hic, umph?"

"You will be my guest."

"I guess I will." Mark forced a laugh. Simon was winking vigorously again, a signal that he had uttered a rare bit of humor.

Simon's friends had not left the corner they had occupied when he was taken away by the stranger. The farmer stumbled and fell headlong into the group as he attempted to spring nimbly from the carriage.

"Where did you git it?" they cried in unison as Mark drove away.

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

Doctor Harley and Foxhall Standhope were busy men during the two days succeeding the conference. More might have been accomplished had not Wilberton Vance suggested that he return and visit a dying patient. The end might come any hour, and she might live a week or two, but the inevitable was not far away.

"There will be nothing left of the estate to pay you, doctor," Vance said, "but I know you would not neglect her if you were in the City, and so come back when you can."

"I have been looking after her ever since I learned she had no money to get medical attention, and I shall not be disappointed in that regard. I have arranged with a young physician to look after her when I cannot get back. He has his instructions and will execute them."

"While her son has lost all respect for himself and the respect of all who once knew him, there may be a remnant of manhood left in him, and when he learns the truth, who knows, it may stop his downward career," said Vance as he bade his friends God speed.

It is unnecessary to follow the doctor and Standhope in their journeying through the country. The doctor had only to announce that Flood was a fraud as could be shown by Mr. Standhope, who had come on from New York to put the line in running order. On the evening of the second day they returned, the doctor going at once to the bedside of his patient.

"I have not long to wait now," she said, feebly. "If I could see Mark before I go, I would die happier. He has done wrong — oh, so wrong, but he is my son, and a mother's love cannot cease even if the boy has fallen in the estimation of others."

"There, do not talk any more now, it exhausts you. I will try and find him if he is in the city," and the doctor hurried away to look for Mark Singleton.

In a short time the doctor located him. He saw that the young man had been drinking, and his companion also. The latter was boisterous and kept telling what he was going to do with the traction line. The doctor readily understood that the man was one Flood or Singleton had succeeded in hoodwinking.

"I wish to see you a moment," and the doctor touched Mark lightly on the shoulder. Singleton sprang to his feet and drew back as if to strike.

"If you was not so many years older than I, you would get one right on the jaw. This thing of you following me around don't go, do you understand?"

"I understand," replied Harley, quietly. "Let me say if I was here for any other purpose than to deliver a message from your mother, my years would not stand in your way. As it is I am tempted to take you and your fool companion and bump your heads together until you get sober."

"What do you mean by a message from my mother?" he asked.

"I doubt very much if she lives through the night."

"You are Dr. Harley, I know; when did you see my mother?"

The doctor looked at his watch. "I left her a half hour ago. She was near the end then."

"My God, doctor, do you mean it?"

"If there is one spark of manhood left in you, Mark Singleton—if there is one drop of pure blood in your veins—if there is even a semblance of love remaining after your feast of husks, for the mother who bore you, and loves you—go to her this moment."

Simon Buchwalter came staggering to them, saying: "Fetch your friend up to the bar an' hev one on me."

"Buchwalter, go to the hotel, go home — go anywhere you please; I'm going to see my sick mother," and Mark pushed the man aside.

"I'll go 'long with you," said the countryman.

"Don't follow me, man. Go to the hotel and go to bed."

Mark followed the doctor, and stood by the bedside of the
mother who was near the unseen land. Then he knelt beside
her. "Is she gone?" he whispered to the doctor.

Even his whisper called her back. In the fading eyes her boy saw the tender light again. "Mother," he said, and then his voice was choked by sobs. She had barely strength to lift her hand until it rested on his bowed head. "Mark, dear, I thought you would come. I wanted to see you before I went away. I wonder what will become of you when I am gone? Won't you try to be a good boy again like you used to be? You was such a comfort to me once. I want you to always love the doctor, here, and Mr. Vance. I would have suffered but for them. The good Lord knows all about it or I would tell Him all the story of their goodness."

They saw her fold her hands; they saw her lips move. Mark, with streaming eyes, was bending over her. They scarcely breathed. She was whispering her last prayer. "Keep him, and let me have him in Your kingdom — don't let my boy get lost — lost." The whisper died upon her lips, the smile that was not of earth came, and then — she went away.

Vance had asked Jean and Eleanor to go with him to see the poor woman, not knowing that the end was so near. She was now the "insensible clod" — simply a bit of earth, but the messenger that sealed her lips left thereon the smile that meant peace. Silently they entered the death chamber. The doctor, though familiar with death scenes, as one of his profession must be, brushed aside the starting tears.

"The end was nearer than we thought," he said.

Mark looked up and, seeing Vance and the ladies, arose, and with great effort said: "If the ladies will go to yonder room I would like to say a word to you gentlemen."

Jean and Eleanor withdrew and Mark motioned them to be seated.

"I know," he said, "that you can only despise me. I despise myself, now that I realize what I have been. Now that I can see what a brute I've been to neglect my mother—" Then his voice broke, and when he regained his speech, he asked: "Tell me, have you been caring for my mother, you and the doctor, Mr. Vance?"

"I knew your father and mother when you were a mere child, and when I learned that she was ill and badly off for life's necessities, I did what any one would do in like circumstances. The doctor did much, however. He would leave other duties unperformed to minister to her. You owe the doctor something that you can pay whether you have a dollar on earth, and that is your good will. If you care for that silent one who loved you, you will regard him with kindly favor."

"I suppose you won't believe me, Mr. Vance, but I'll tell you, and I will prove to you that bad as I have been — bad as I am — there is a little decent streak left in me. The dust and dirt of dishonor and dissipation has so coated my soul, if I have one, that it took her dying prayer to brush it off. I have been working against you, Mr. Vance, while you have been caring for my poor mother."

"I knew all about your work, but that would be little excuse for me to neglect a woman in distress."

"I'll tell you. I hate to leave this house tonight," said Mark, "but I must see Buchwalter — he was the drunken fellow I was with when you met me, doctor. I got him to promise that he would go into Court tomorrow. I have got to see him before Flood sees him and get him to go to your office."

"Mark, don't forget tomorrow the good resolve you have made tonight. You may not have the ready money to arrange for the burial of your mother. Leave that to me. Be a man again and when the new road is completed I'll take care of you."

"I will do my best. Give me a chance, Mr. Vance. I swear — I believe I can get up again. Try me and if I make a break, let me slide.

"I fooled my money away, and I'm down and out — at least I was when Flood found me and gave me money to work against you. I thought you as well as every one else despised me, and so I took his money when I hadn't even a dime left. One thing he hired me to do that makes me more ashamed than anything else, and that was the dirty trick I played on Norma Lane."

"How was that?" Vance was interested at once.

Mark related the story already familiar, and when he had finished, Vance said: "I am glad you told me that. Mark, I want you to help me save her from that man."

"I'll do it. Flood has treated me fairly. He has paid me for my work. It is only that one little mean act he hired me to do that I get ugly over when I think of it. The thing that gets me is, that while I was doing you dirt, you was doing everything for my mother. I want one of you to go with me to the Wilson House. I think Buchwalter had sense enough to go there, and if he is not too drunk we will fix him for tomorrow."

"I will go with you. I wish to see Simpson anyway—and—"

"I understand — the undertaker. Mr. Vance, this may not be the time to say so, but if you give me a chance to earn money, I'll pay back every cent you advance for me."

"Mark, if you will be a man — the man your mother would have you be — you will have paid me back all and more. I belong to an Order that seeks to lift men up, not pull them down."

"I know what you mean," Mark said, "but that Order gave me a jolt once."

"When they black-balled you. That could not be helped; you was not a man then. Get on your feet, be honest, be upright, don't get down into the dirt again and every ball in the box will be white when you try it the next time."



## CHAPTER TWELVE.

MONG those who were wont to enjoy the crowds, the sights and scenes, and so much of the music in the theater as came floating out upon the wide porticos of the Casino, was Margery, "the slave," as she was pleased to call herself. "I'm jist a

goin' to steal a little time to rest," she would say, and those who needed her services, or rather her help, could testify that, if stealing time was a capital offense, Margery would be serving a life sentence.

The overture had just began when she sat by a table as near the high, open window as was possible. The Casino windows were open, but they were not within reach of those who, from the manager's standpoint, would steal more than time, and yet not violate law. With a sigh that indicated comfort rather than weariness, Margery said: "Well, I can hear that music and not cost me a cent. I 'spose I must buy a glass of pop or something. That hungry lookin' waiter keeps a eyein' me as if the place was his'n. I'd buy a 'growler' if I could, but there's so many fanatics" — Margery called them "fan a ticks" — "and there's no tellin' how they'll talk about me. There's women in this town that would dabble up my character as they do the dresses they wash dishes in."

Presently she motioned to the white-aproned waiter. As he drew near her and paused, she commanded: "There's no poison ivy climin' 'round me, an' I ain't a yellin' my order loud enough to hear it to the depot."

The waiter then stood close beside her, and she arose to whisper in his ear:

"Speak out," he said, "this ain't no whisperin 'gallery."

"You are a polite sort of a thing, ain't you?" Margery snapped.

"I'm hired to take orders — I'm not hired to go into a

whisperin' match."

It's lucky you ain't hired for your beauty. You wouldn't last as long as the color did in Mrs. Peasley's new dress—that went the first washin."

"I don't see you wearin' any medals," replied the waiter. "Now, if you want anything, order."

In very low tones Margery told her desire.

"One up," yelled the waiter.

It was a modest-sized glass that the woman stared at when the waiter had placed it on the table. There was more foam than solid beer at that, and Margery dryly asked: "Is that 'one up?'"

"That is," and he did not attempt to get the nickel she put on the table.

"If that is 'one up,' you'd want about nine down to taste it. What do you call that, anyway?"

"That's Wurzburger."

"Wurst bugger — that's purty good. Put yourself in the same class with the beer. You'r the worst bugger I've met."

"You can go on at the moving picture show amateur nights with them 'gags' — I'm busy — a dime, please."

"A dime for that? Why, man, you're robbin' me when you take a nickel."

"Five cents more now or get out."

The waiter had not observed that Cyrus Flood had taken a seat at a table near by. The fellow knew Flood and, when he heard a sharp rap upon the table near him, turned at once.

"Never mind what she owes you. See what she will have and I'll settle."

There was no hesitation on Margery's part, and when Flood remarked that he had seen her at Vance's office, she replied: "Oh, yes, I'm the slave."

"By the way, you know Norma Lane, I presume?"

"Sure I do."

"I would prefer not to send a note to her, and yet I am desirous of seeing her this afternoon. Would you have time to go to her home, and tell her that I would like to see her without fail this afternoon?"

"I might find time," remarked Margery hesitatingly.

"I need not remind you that I pay for discreetness as well as promptness."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you will deliver my message without others hearing what you tell her."

"Sure, Mike."

"Then take this and go quickly," he said, handing her a dollar.

As Margery was about to leave Aunt Louise drew near, and paused as she frowned severely.

"A nice place for a respectable woman to come. People setting around drinking in this shameless manner." Turning to Flood she asked: "Did you see anything of my niece, Eleanor Clay, and Miss Vance — I suppose you know them?"

"I have not had the pleasure of meeting them this afternoon."

Aunt Louise adjusted her glasses, and looking sternly at Margery and the empty bottle in front of her, said: "I always supposed it was hard work made your face so red, but I can see now."

"If you have your spectacles on right, I suppose you can see. It wouldn't hurt that taller colored face of yours if it had a bit of red in it." "If I had to have it red, I'd git a paint brush, some red lead and flaxseed oil and paint it right."

Margery did not wait to hear the conclusion of Aunt Louise's remarks, but hurried away upon her mission. As the good lady from the country was watching her departure, the orchestra began the prelude to "The Holy City." Aunt Louise was now listening intently to the music. Presently a voice began the solo, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem."

"You don't tell me," she said, "that they sing church music here. What kind of service have they got this afternoon?"

"They have excellent meetings here," replied Flood, "but you have to have a ticket to get in. I have one I cannot use this afternoon. While you are waiting for the ladies you might drop in and enjoy the services, as you put it."

"I don't care if I do," she said. "This is surely a strange place. They serve the Lord and the devil at the same time."

Flood told her where to enter, and as she disappeared he withdrew to a secluded spot. He could not understand why Norma failed to make her appearance, as usual. As she had never encouraged him to call upon her at home, he was beginning to get uneasy.

He realized that he had neglected the business that brought him to Lake City, and he recalled also that Mark had failed to report to him as he had anticipated. While he was yet thinking about the young man, Mark came down the long porch, stopping occasionally to look around. He observed that the tables were quite deserted. He was about to go into the Casino when Flood called out to him:

"Where have you been, Mark?" he asked.

"You have not heard, I presume, of the death of my mother."

"I had not heard of it. Why did you not tell me?"

"I have had little opportunity. I sent word to you that Simon Buchwalter was in town and that we would see you before he went home. While I was with him — drinking with him, as you may suppose — a man came and told me that my mother was dying. I did not neglect her more while at work for you than before, but I neglected her, and when I heard that she was dying it sobered me. I hurried home. I found her near the end, and mother like, she forgave all my misdeeds and neglect. I was by her side when she died."

"How did you manage to bury her, did you have money enough?"

"There was enough money to care for her properly in death, if not in life," said Mark impressively.

"What became of Buchwalter?"

"He went home."

"Without seeing me - that is strange."

"Stranger things than that will likely happen in the near future."

"What do you mean, Mark?"

"Up to this time I have tried faithfully to do all you have asked me to do, and I consider that you have paid me liberally for doing it. I am prepared to give you a statement of my expenditures."

"That is all right, Mark. Meet me at the hotel this evening. I know you will need money now, and I'll give you more, but I wish you had sent Buchwalter to me."

"You don't owe me a dollar, Mr. Flood."

"You have done all you can for your mother now, and tomorrow we must get busy again. I think I have Vance in a corner now, and we will finish the job very soon."

"Do you know who furnished the money to keep my mother alive while I neglected her?"

"I do not, but let us get away from that subject. I am waiting for some one, you know perhaps, to whom I refer, and I will see you this evening."

Mark did not wait to tell what he had intended. As he was about to leave the Casino, a gentleman whom he had never met stopped him, and asked if he happened to know one Cyrus Flood. Mark told him that Flood was waiting to meet some one — "I think, however, it is a lady."

"It is very likely he is not anticipating a call from me," replied the stranger.

Having been told where Flood could be found he hurried to meet him before his expected guest should arrive.

"Is this Mr. Flood?" he asked as he took in every detail of the appearance of the supposed agent of the Great Northern.

"That is my name," replied Flood.

"I am Foxhall Standhope, assistant secretary of the Great Northern Electric Company. I understand you represent our Company here. I believe I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance."

"I have not been long with the Company," replied Flood. A wave of color swept over his face and receded, leaving it paler than before.

"So I have been led to believe," was Standhope's reply.

"Did you come to assist me, or am I supposed to be relieved?"

"So far as the Great Northern is concerned, your labors here are concluded."

"Is that so?" There was a sneer in his voice. His effrontery had returned. He saw that he must drop the mask he had assumed.

Standhope did not reply and Flood continued:

"I am deeply grieved to learn that my services are not appreciated by the Company, but I beg to inform you that my work is not completed as yet, but will be soon."

"So far as your private affairs are concerned, I do not

claim the right to interfere, but as the pretended agent of our Company your work, I say, is done."

"We will not argue that further. While I do not know that you any more than I have the right to say who is the real representative, I will not attempt to interfere with your game, whatever it may be, but as I am anticipating a call, or an interview with a friend, I shall ask you to excuse me."

Standhope did not reply. As he turned to leave he met Norma coming slowly down the veranda.

He recognized her, having seen her at Vance's residence the night he arrived. There had been no opportunity for an introduction, as Norma and Marion returned immediately after the interview with Wilberton Vance — after Jean had so chillingly said "Good evening, Miss Lane."

The memory of that greeting flashed over her as she met Mr. Standhope, for she had caught a glimpse of him and remembered the man and the time. She was pale, and Flood recalled that he had never seen an expression upon her face so determined; so stern. No smile answered his, as was common.

"I was here this morning," she said.

"What was the matter? You have not been particularly desirous of seeing me the last few days, it seems."

"I have seen you so often that all my friends, save one or two, refuse to recognize me when we meet. You know best whether I should bear these insults."

"I shall be ready to leave here soon and you must go with me."

"Do you mean that I must go and leave Marion?"

"I cannot take her along."

"You told me when you asked me to be your wife that you would soon be rich."

"And you informed me that when your sister was of age you would come in possession of considerable means."

"Was you counting on marrying me for my money?" she asked coldly.

"Let us not quarrel about that. When I get through with certain friends of yours I shall be well off. Won't you have something to drink with me?"

"You know that I will not. Can it be possible that you are all my friends say you are?"

"What are your friends saying about me?" His mocking manner left her in a mood to answer plainly.

"They have told me you were a fraud, an impostor, a liar and a sneak, and that you have no honest regard for me."

"Is that all they said? They must have been good friends of yours. I suppose the gentleman with the broken heart was one of these delightful friends."

"He is a gentleman. He has committed a great offense in your eyes. He has loved me and asked me to be his wife. What do you propose to do?"

"If I do not choose to tell, you will fall back on the discarded one, I presume."

"Will you answer my question? I want the answer now."

Before Flood could reply, a message came from the office that a gentleman was waiting there for him.

"Do not go before I see you again. Go and sit through the performance. This is an important engagement."

Flood encountered Neil Dare as he was hurrying to meet the engagement and could not resist the temptation to gloat over what he was pleased to consider his defeated rival. "She is back there," he said, as with thin lips drawn he showed his teeth like a snarling dog, at least Neil thought so. Flood's face was close to his as he sneered: "Go and whine to her now like the puppy you are."

"Puppy, you say, puppy?" Before Flood could get beyond his reach, Neil slapped him first on one cheek, then on the

other. "Puppies whine when they get slapped — suppose you whine now."

Flood made a motion as if about to draw a weapon.

Neil sprang upon him: "Another move like that and I will forget that I try to be a gentleman. Another insulting word and I will beat your face into a pulp."

"We will settle this later — I have an engagement," said Flood, hoarsely.

Neil saw that Norma had witnessed the occurrence, and as Flood hurried away he went to her determined to know the worst, expecting bitter reproaches.

"Norma, you saw me lose my temper, but he insulted me cruelly and I made him know that I was his master, physically at least."

"Was I the cause of it?" she asked, quietly.

"Yes and no. He said, 'I would go to you now, and whine like a puppy,' and then, Norma, I slapped him. I did not do him the honor of striking him with my fist. I took my open hand and slapped him, and he did not resent it. I await your reproaches."

"I have not the right now, Neil, to reproach you. I went away from you to another, and there is nothing to say, only this: You were the first of all my friends to doubt me. I have no friends now but Mr. Vance, and, and he whom you punished just now. Yes, there is one other—my little sister."

"Dear little Marion — she is loyal to you, and whether you believe it or not, I am quite as loyal. Norma, I love you as in that sweeter yesterday before he came."

"Don't, Neil, it is too late."

"No, not too late, Norma — come back to me, come back, dear."

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN.

HERE was a carriage waiting for Attorney Drake when he came in on the train from New York. The lady that accompanied him was heavily veiled and hurriedly they entered the carriage. Although the weather was uncomfortably sultry, the blinds

were drawn. Vance had received a telegram that Drake was coming, and he and Dr. Harley were waiting in the office of the traction company for him. When they saw a lady step from the carriage, they wondered if Drake had not taken a wedding journey instead of a business trip. And yet he had sent a message to keep watch upon Norma Lane that she did not elope with Flood. They were not left long in doubt. Drake had been greeted warmly by Vance and the doctor, and he said: "You can congratulate me, gentlemen; I found her."

"It looks like it," replied the doctor.

"Why didn't you tell us, and the 'fatted calf' would have been ready for the wedding dinner."

"The wedding dinner? Well, that is not half as embarrassing to me as it must be to the lady. Permit me — Mrs. Kennedy Woodward — Mr. Vance, Dr. Harley." The gentlemen bowed and murmured the usual inanities.

"Perhaps you may be better enlightened if she takes the nom-de-plume of her husband — Cyrus Flood."

"Mrs. Flood!" they exclaimed in unison.

"The man you know as Cyrus Flood is Kennedy Woodward of New York City. I made search for the lady and found her. She is here at my earnest solicitation. She came will-

ingly, not merely to confront a renegade husband, but to save one of her sex from a life of misery."

The doctor was first to give her a hearty welcome, and when he released her hand she was laughing through her tears. Vance was no less cordial. "You shall go at once to my home," he said. "You are tired, and after a good rest we will talk — but first — let me send for Norma. Drake, we will keep the carriage for the present, and Marion will go and bring her sister here at once."

Norma was inclined at first to rebel, but when she learned that she was expected to go at once to Mr. Vance's office or his residence that evening she chose to go to the office, where there was less chance of meeting Jean.

Vance was waiting at the curb for Norma, and the girls were introduced to Mrs. Kennedy Woodward, who remained in company of Drake, until the arrival of the young woman she came so far to see.

So far as Flood was concerned she could have made affidavit, and that together with a copy of the marriage certificate would have been sufficient, but a woman's honor was at stake. The man known as Flood had won her love and all that was left of the beautiful fabric her fancy had woven was ashes.

"Mrs. Woodward has come all the way from New York to see you, Norma," said Vance.

The wan-faced woman smiled, and in low, sweet tones, she spoke: "I can understand now that I see you how his fickle heart went out to you, Miss Lane."

"I do not understand," replied Norma.

Vance nodded to his friend Drake to tell the story, much of which has been told.

"You will understand better, Miss Lane, when I tell you that the husband of Mrs. Woodward is known to you as Cyrus Flood."

The wave of red that swept over her fair cheeks quickly receded and in her eyes there was a gleam of anger. Neil sat at his desk well back of her, but she turned to see what his face was telling. He did not look up from his work — it was as if the story had no interest for him. She knew that he must be glorying in the presence of this woman. That Neil was seemingly indifferent did not add to her composure.

As Norma made no response, Drake continued: "As you are doubtless aware, Mr. Flood, as we will continue to call him, came here to bring disaster to Mr. Vance, and to do so without being detected, as he hoped, assumed the name of Cyrus Flood. A few of Mr. Vance's friends sought to find his address. This was accomplished through a letter written by this lady, who was obliged to leave the apartments she occupied when her husband left New York, because he refused to furnish her the money to pay the rent unless she made application for divorce, that he might marry a young lady in Lake City. He did not give her name. He was too cautious for that. Mrs. Woodward has his letter in her possession now, and you can see it when you wish.

"With all his caution," Drake continued, "he failed to destroy Mrs. Woodward's answer. The letter was torn carelessly and thrown into a waste-basket, where it was found by a person whose business it was to gather and keep his torn and discarded mail. This letter came into my hands. I had business in New York, and I sought and found the deserted wife of Kennedy Woodward, alias Flood. This, Miss Lane, is the occasion of her presence in our midst."

"He told me that he had never been married—that he was free to care for me, and listening to his pleading, I promised that some day I would marry him. Mr. Vance, who has been my good friend, even when all others turned against me—"

"Norma!" It was Marion who interrupted, "did I turn against you?"

"No, dear, you were loyal, and-"

"And Neil, too." Marion went to Neil's side and, placing her arm about his neck, cried: "He was always loyal."

"Perhaps," said Norma. "But I was about to say, that when Mr. Vance told me that Mr. Flood was working against him, I said I would marry no man who could not look him in the face and say, 'I have been your friend.' I have not had opportunity to tell him of my determination. I felt for a time that Mr. Flood was being misrepresented, persecuted, really, because he cared for me. Now that I know, I wish to see him once more, and if this lady who came to do me this great kindness will go with me, I shall tell him that women are not all false to one another, and that so long as I have a home she shall have one — that she is too noble to waste her life on such as he."

"You lovely one," cried Mrs. Woodward, and in a moment she had Norma in her arms, and the men sprang to their feet.

"By — memories of Melchizedek, this is just like a play, Wilberton," and switching from the pocket of his long "Prince Albert" a handkerchief of generous size, the doctor blew a blast, like a bugle call to battle.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN.

HE curious reader may wonder why Marion Lane was the hired stenographer in the office of Wilberton Vance when it is remembered that Henry S. Lane left his children enough to keep them beyond the necessity of working for wages. It

was Marion's desire, her proposition, and Vance humored her, as her work would end when the Seminary term began. She had mastered shorthand and was quite proficient, and skillful as well, with the machine.

When the August days should come she would go back to school, and her music studies. Vance had encouraged her in this line, believing that in time she would win fame, for nature had made her a musician, and skilled masters would make her an artist.

After the doctor had received the offer of \$50,000 for his little farm where great oil deposits were found, he told Marion, if his fortune did not go up in smoke she should go to Europe and complete her studies.

"Why should I go at your expense?" she asked.

"Well, why shouldn't you? Vance says I will get \$100,000 for the farm, and I believe it. What could I do with one hundred thousand dollars? Your grandfather, if he could know it, would smile in his old proud way, that his orderly sergeant was helping to develop the genius the good Lord gave you. Then it would sort of be squaring the debt, child."

"Did you owe my grandpapa?"

"I owed him my life - that is all, dear."

"Tell me about it."

"You know the story; I told you not long ago."

"Yes, but I want to hear it again, it is all so fine, so splendid."

He told the story of a cavalry charge. It is not known to the world like Pickett's immortal deed, but the charge of "The Light Brigade" was not more daring or more glorious.

Marion's work for the day was done at the office, and the doctor having frequent consultations with Vance, accompanied her home.

"Come in, dinner will be ready in a moment," Marion said.

"I'd like to, but dear me, I've been neglecting my patients shamefully, child."

Had he told the exact truth he would have said that patients had been neglecting him. On his list there was one family able to pay him, all the others were of the class known as the "God blessed poor," and for whose care the doctor could render his bill to heaven.

"You shall neglect your patients a little longer, if you please. I have invited you to remain to dinner. I happen to know that you are very fond of strawberries and cream, and I ordered the nicest berries in the market, and the richest cream. I had you in mind when I ordered."

In his eyes there was an expression of tenderness, reverence, awe, as though this girl whose life he had fought for, was sacred — holy. "And you thought of me, did you, little one?" The pathetic note in his voice touched her, and as she struggled to suppress a sob, said: "Come, I'm sure they are waiting."

\* \* \* \* \* \* \*

When Harold Brady learned from Neil of the arrival of Cyrus Flood's wife he hastened to Vance's to get Jean's views on the subject. He told her Norma's offer of a home to the woman, and how she had expressed a desire for one more interview with Flood, and this was to be in the presence of Mrs. Kennedy Woodward. He told Jean how delighted her father was with the situation.

"Now there is just one thing to do," said Harold, "and that is, we must run Flood out of town before he manages to get the road into the Courts."

"I would like to be present when Flood and his wife have their interview."

"Norma and you must be friends again. It looks very much as if we had been mistaken."

"We. You are letting me down easily, ain't you? Just as if you had not defended her all the time. Just as if you and papa were not ready to beat me with your fists almost for being cruel and suspicious. I did have little faith in her; she treated poor Neil so badly, and I do not care much whether we are friends or not."

Harold was quite certain that her reference to Neil was an excuse, an apology for her discourteous act. He had felt all the time that Jean had been rash in her conclusions concerning Norma, yet he offered little protest. One does not protest loudly against the views of the girl he loves, particularly when these opinions concern one of the sex. He was wise enough to know that a quarrel on such a subject was not easily forgotten and he did not want to quarrel with Jean. Her piquant sayings, her saucy air, her dashing manner, more than her beauty, enthralled him. He knew he loved her in that helpless manner that only matrimony cures. Now he was ready for that cure. He had waited long, he had wooed ardently, sighed deeply, and as the sinking sun left part of its glory on her face the spell was deepened.

"Jean," he said, "speaking of 'poor Neil,' reminds me of poor Harold. Do you recall the other night when the moon was telling us something? It was only a whisper from the

lonely man in the moon, and I was about to catch it and whisper it to you when——"

"When papa broke in," she interrupted.

"I was going to tell you, dear," he was saying when she signalled for silence.

"Go on; I was looking for papa. He usually looms up when you reach that point in our continued story." A smile, a faint, fleeting smile lingered a moment on her lips, and with hands folded in her lap, head drooping like a rose overburdened with its sweetness—waited for the words that women sometimes long for.

She did not wait long.

"Sweetheart of mine, when will you answer, yes?"

"Tomorrow," she said, "maybe tonight," she murmured, "now," she whispered, "now."

"And it is yes?" His eyes were hungry.

"You would not believe me when I said 'no,' what else can I say?"

"Say that you love me, my beautiful one — I have waited so long."

"Did you never hear me?" she asked. "I have said it so often to myself." The great, red, round face of the sun hid itself behind the western hills.

Eleanor Clay and her Aunt were to return to their home on the morrow. The time had been short to Eleanor, but Aunt Louise was yearning for the little farm — the farm that would be Eleanor's some day.

"I wish you were going to stay longer with us," Vance had said at dinner that evening.

"I've been sponging long enough. Sponging and loafing around."

"You have not been sponging, I can testify to that, and as for 'loafing around,' as you put it, what do we go visiting for?"

"Well, I'm not one that wants to wear out my welcome. My second cousin, Aminidab Wells, from New Jersey, came on to visit us one fall, and he stayed and stayed. I don't begrudge any cheerful body a month's victuals, but he felt that he was payin' his way with his prayers. I'm not makin' light of religion, an' I try to lead an exemplary life, but I don't believe that groanin' an' moanin', as if one had a protracted case of stomach ache, is servin' the Lord. Aminidab prayed us all into heaven and out of it several times, an' then I suggested to him that the prayer meetin' at Snake Hollow, in the State of New Jersey, was waitin' for him."

"You need not feel that we regard you in any light but that of a guest that is welcome," he said, as he suppressed a laugh.

"You and your daughter have been very kind. I can understand why Eleanor might be more welcome than I am."

"Why?" he asked.

"I'm a cranky old maid, and she is young, an' nice, I think. I know she is a good girl, an' would make some man a good wife. Maybe it sounds silly in me talkin' that way, as if I was tryin' to rope somebody in, but Eleanor would be a wife any man might be proud of. I don't mean that she's so nice lookin', but she's one a man could 'tie to.'"

"I was thinking that myself," said he.

"Was you? Well, well, that's surprisin'. She wouldn't own me agin' as her Aunt if she knew I said such a thing, but if you and Eleanor could just take a notion to each other, I'd be willin' to have the preacher say: 'All flesh is grass'—'earth to earth, an' dust to dust'— over my remains."

"There comes the doctor," said Vance.

"Sure enough," she replied. "Now, if the doctor is your friend, don't leave us to fuss with one another. The doctor don't hanker for me, an' I'm not a settin' out on a willow limb myself."

"Surely not. Ah, doctor, you are welcome."

"'As the flowers that bloom in the spring,' I 'spose we should say," and Aunt Louise adjusted her glasses.

"The ladies are about to leave us, doctor, I am sorry to say."

"I should think you would hate to go, madame, just as you are beginning to enjoy the theater," said the doctor.

"That's a poor joke, doctor," the old maid replied.

"I have some that's worse than that."

"Well, go and bury them, an' bury them deep;" she spoke with great vigor.

"If I ever stand among the ransomed," she continued, "an' see any of those miserable girls that was in that show come in, through the mercy afforded to man, I hope they'll have more clothes on 'en than they had that day Flood give me a ticket to the 'services,' as he called it."

It was a quiet chuckle the doctor emitted.

"The lady's remark about the ransomed reminds me," said the doctor, "of Aunt Sarah Beasley, an old colored woman down at Eden. She attended church one day — a white congregation — there being no colored, and telling me about it the next day, said: 'Dat white man dat preached giv de Ransom's a poke, yisteday.' 'How was that, Aunty?' I asked. 'You know, Doc. John, dat dem Ransom's is stuck up niggers, case deys mos' white. Well, dat preacher jes spoke der name right out in meetin'. He said dar was none o' dem Ransom's ever knowed, how deep was de wattah's crost, an den sumpthin' bout dere sheep dat got lost, an Lord knows dem Ransomes neber had no more sheep dan a rabbit.'"

Aunt Louise looked at him reprovingly, but made no response.

"Your remarks," he continued, "concerning the dress of those girls reminds me of a passage in the Scriptures — Proverbs, if I remember aright—'He taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man;' the natural inference is—"

"Never mind the inference, Doctor," she broke in, "there are passages in the same Book more edifying. I would suggest you read the parable of the man with one talent."

"The point of order is well taken," said the doctor, bowing defferentially, while Vance laughed heartily.

During this time Eleanor was engaged in putting the finishing touching to her packing. The baggage was as near ready as possible and the next day she would be back in the village, back to the humdrum life, and "the tall, splendid looking man," she was thinking, would sit no more with her in the quaint rustic bower. No more would she listen to the deep, low voice, telling her of his work.

The story of his daily doings was more interesting than love tales in the well-stocked library — more interesting than a heart story told by the rustic beaux of her home village.

She knew that Jean and Harold were out there where she had sat with Vance. From her window she could catch a glimpse of them, now and then.

Perhaps Harold was telling the oft-interrupted story that Jean was willing to listen to now. The low sigh, the unbidden sigh she breathed, the bit of moisture gathering in her violet eyes told her what she was persistently denying to herself.

"Jean thinks I could not love him because he is her father and she only a year younger than I," she thought. Then she heard Harold say:

"Good night, good night! parting in such sweet sorrow, That I shall say good night till it be morrow."

Rarely had there been a "morrow" that he was not with Jean and now she must know and feel the half bitter joy—the bitter-sweet of a love story not her own—but Jean's.

Her reverie was interrupted by Jean's tempestuous entrance.

"Kiss me, Eleanor," Jean said, as she threw herself in the outstretched arms. It was not necessary that Jean should tell what had occurred — Eleanor knew — the radiant face told it all."

When Jean had said: "Good night, my Romeo," in answer to Harold's borrowed words from the bard's most ardent lover, she returned to the house, where her father was being entertained by the doctor and Aunt Louise. Signalling him to her side, she said: "Eleanor is going home in the morning, and I am going to take her out there on the lawn in a moment. It would be merely an act of politeness if you sought to make the closing hours of her visit more interesting than they would be listening to our gabble. I might hint, incidentally, that Harold was going to say something to you before he left, but I told him that was a mere matter of detail—a perfunctory duty that could be attended at any time."

"Ah! and you have taken my consent for granted?"

"Haven't I heard you tell what an excellent 'esquire' he was? Well, he is my esquire now."

"Harold is a good boy, dear," and he drew her closely to him and kissed her."

"If I could peek around the corner of the house in just fifteen minutes and see you kiss some one else more tenderly even than you have kissed me, I would rush out and cry, 'bless you, my children.' I am radiantly happy, but if you should come into your own, the love and affection your heart will crave, now that I am going to boss Harold instead of you, I would feel that the apotheosis of our lives was at hand."

"And if she will listen to me, you will be content?"

"More than content, my papa." A dash of color swept over his face as he stood abashed in the presence of his

daughter. "Excuse me a moment," he said to the doctor and Aunt Louise.

He saw Eleanor and Jean stroll down from the veranda. He heard Jean say: "I must telephone Harold. He is at the club, and he wanted me to call him up, if only to say good night again."

Eleanor did not hear his approaching footsteps. Nature's carpet on the lawn was soft and green. She started as he came suddenly and silently to her. Her cheeks were stained as though a rose had left all its color as well as its sweetness there.

It was no sighing swain that came to Eleanor Clay. It was a man so many years her senior, that he hesitated—that was all—but he told the story simply, manfully and with tender dignity. Then Eleanor—but why should prying eyes and listening ears destroy the sweetness of a heart story.

"We will tell them all about it. We will say: 'The trunks will be unpacked tonight, and the end of your visit is undetermined.'"

Jean was in the room with Aunt Louise and the doctor when Vance and Eleanor paused at the door. Her hand was resting lightly, but trustfully, upon Vance's arm. Jean caught a glimpse of the transfigured faces. "Look! Aunt Louise," she cried, "look at that guilty pair. It won't be Eleanor Clay very long."

"Glory be——" and the old maid's hands were folded as if in prayer.

The doctor sat in open mouthed wonder a moment. "Memories of Melchizedec, Vance, I never dreamed——" he abruptly rose and left the rooms. Thoughts of his promised fortune faded. What was money? They were mating, these friends of his, as all God's creatures mate, throughout His Kingdom, but he—the years had left him stranded—and his one beloved was a bit of a girl."

He heard Aunt Louise say: "One old maid in the family is enough, please God." Then he turned away and left them, uttering no word — no friendly good night. He looked up at the laughing moon. It was mocking him. The moon as well as the world is wont to mock an old man's love.



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN.

YRUS FLOOD had an interview that afternoon that was decidedly unsatisfactory. He sought diligently to find Mark. He visited all the familiar haunts, but could find no trace of his late employee. The time was ripe to begin proceedings,

and the home office was making persistent inquiries. The fact that Standhope was with Vance prevented any further double dealing. Vance, he knew, was now cognizant of his purposes and was doubtless repairing the damage as fast as possible. What disturbed him most was the disappearance of Mark Singleton. "Why could he not be found?" he asked himself repeatedly.

Another thing disturbed him. He had received a note from Norma, asking for an interview the next day. She fixed the hour at two o'clock — the place where they had met last — The Casino.

"I anticipate you will be greatly surprised," the note ran on, "whether agreeably or not, remains to be seen. I have met a very affable gentleman by the name of Standhope. He is as fine looking as he is agreeable, but alas, he has not told us whether or not he has a wife somewhere in the world, but that is the way with men at times. I will be able to tell you positively whether I will accompany you when you leave the city, and incidentally I predict that you will be leaving soon."

"What does she mean, I wonder? What does she know? There seems to be a covert threat in that last line — I predict you will be leaving soon." It is a painful truth, I must leave

soon, if the case does not get into Court. Haines and Buchwalter were to be here, and I must find Mark, as he has been arranging matters with them. The time is at hand for them to act."

He had been sitting in the office of the hotel, looking out upon the street, but no one passed that he knew. Presently some one spoke to him, some one entered into conversation with him, and drew his attention from the street. While he was thus engaged Mark Singleton passed. The young man looked in at the open window shaded by the awning, but saw nothing of Flood. When at last the agent of the Syndicate looked down the street Mark was turning into the avenue that led to Vance's office. Flood immediately followed.

Singleton being more than a square distant, there was neither hope of catching him nor calling him, but he hurried on knowing that as long as he kept in sight he would run him down somewhere.

Just as he was about to cross one of the main business streets of the city he observed coming toward him, not from the direction he was traveling, but at right angles, Norma Lane and a veiled lady, who, he thought, reminded him of some one.

"I must keep Mark in sight, or I would ask her what that note meant," was his mental comment as he glanced again toward them.

He had to wait because of a street car blockade, or climb abroad a car, that he might pass to the other side. This or a detour was unavoidable. As he was considering what should be done, the car in front of him moved slowly and Flood dashed through. Eagerly he looked for Singleton. The young man was nowhere in sight. He increased his gait until it was almost a run, but his late employee had unconsciously eluded him. He hurried past the street on which Vance's office was located. After going a block or two further he returned, and

paused a moment, looking all about him. Less than a square to the north was Vance's Traction office. He saw Norma and the strange lady stop and lean over the low iron fence. He knew that some one had bidden them gather the exquisite roses within reach.

Mechanically he turned and sauntered in that direction. It could not be possible that Mark was there. He had been seen but once since the death of his mother. It mattered not, he thought, who the veiled lady was, he would talk to Norma. She could not refuse him. He did not want to wait until tomorrow to know the meaning of her note.

While he was yet a half square distant he saw the ladies pass in at the side gate, where all the bushes and shrubs and flowers were, and they were then out of his sight.

Vance's office and property was at the intersection of prominent streets. To keep on was to pass the rose lawn, to turn westward, at the corner took him past the front office door and the window at which Neil sat.

At thought of Neil his cheeks began to burn, as they did when Neil slapped them. He had not sought opportunity of revenge yet. It was not time. When a receiver was put in charge, he would see to it that Neil should be the first to lose his position. That would ease the smart somewhat, and then if physical revenge was unwise, he would see to it that Norma would be by his side when Neil was ordered to vacate his desk.

He had reached the corner by this time, and leaning against the fence a moment, heard merry laughter within. It was now no time for dreams, he realized. Neil or Vance might appear and he did not relish the idea of being ordered away as a common sidewalk loafer, and this Neil would do if he saw him. Slowly he drew near the open front door. Neil sat with his back to the window. He was in conversation with a lady. He stepped near the curb that he might

see. What he saw caused him to swear terrible oaths, even though sworn softly. She, Norma, was smiling into the face of the man he hated. "Ah, how I hate him," he thought.

"What creatures of whim and impulse women are to be sure," he said aloud — "creatures, that's the word. A week ago Norma had said she hated Neil, and now she is smiling into his face. Hell! I can't stand that," he hissed. For the moment anger and hate blinded him, and when he saw clearly again a young man was coming down the steps near him. Unconsciously, perhaps, he gasped for breath. The man he had been looking for, his employee, his tool, leisurely strolling out of Vance's office, and in an unconcerned manner, neither abashed nor startled, paused, indifferently in front of him.

"What were you doing in there?" he asked.

"I had business there," replied Mark.

"Oh, you had? If I know anything about it you have business with me."

"Then, perhaps, you don't know anything about it."

"Don't trifle with me, Mark, I'm not in a very pleasant mood just now."

"You look it."

"Be careful, young man." Flood showed his teeth in an ugly manner.

"I'm much more careful than I was a week ago. Now, if you want to talk — if you want to go over matters — let us adjourn to the Wilson House, I'm stopping there now."

"On my expense, of course."

"No, not on your expense," returned Mark, calmly. "Not on your expense, and not on the expense of the Overland Syndicate." Without further comment they moved away, Flood fearing to attract attention and Mark being fearful of a face appearing at the window and spoil the plans for the morrow.

When they were seated in a quiet nook in the hotel, Flood said: "I would like to know what this means, Mr. Singleton?" He became dignified and formal — threats did not seem to have much effect upon Mark.

"If I recollect aright," Mark replied, "the last words we had was shortly after my mother's death. Among other things I said: 'Do you know who helped my mother when she was ill and I neglected her?' You said we would not discuss the subject further that evening. I was about to tell you that it was Wilberton Vance who furnished the money to get her the necessaries of life. Now, I am not excusing myself. I alone was to blame—liquor or no liquor—for you gave me money and asked only an accounting of the money spent in your service. That was fine of you, and I have told them about it."

"Told them — whom did you tell?"

"Vance and Dr. Harley — and by the way, I feel like getting down on all fours like a whipped dog, when I meet that old boy. He was her physician, and he stuck to her and made no charge. I told Vance and the doctor, when I learned all, that I would pay the doctor a dollar or two at a time, as I could get the work. Vance then said, that if I would try to be a man again, just as I was before I began to throw my money to the dogs, he would give me a situation where I could look a man in the face when my day's work was done.

"Of course, I told them," he continued, calmly, "what I had done for you, and what you had done for me, and then I said, 'I will go to Flood, and tell him that I was through. I tried to that day, but you put me off—you deferred it. Two days after my mother's funeral I was at work for Vance undoing what I did when under pay for you."

"You are a nice sneak, ain't you?" Flood sneered.

"I would feel that way about it myself if your company had been on the square, but they were trying to rob Wilberton Vance of thousands, and I got a hundred or two from their agent."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Go right on with my work."

"For me?"

"No, for Vance."

"You? You working for Vance? Why, you-"

"Cut it off there," and Mark's smile was more dangerous than a frown.

"After all I have done for you?"

"Flood, don't work the pathetic racket, it ain't in your line. I am not here to quarrel. It would do no good. I've done a lot of dirty work for you, and you paid me for it, and so far we are square. This is my home; here is where I went to the dogs, and here is where I am going to get back among men. Wilberton Vance is going to stand by me, and I am going to do the square thing by him. I will be living here long after you go away, if nothing happens to me. I said I was going to be square with Vance, and to do that, I must repair all the damage I did while in your employ. From your standpoint it looks like a dirty trick. From the standpoint of decency it looks fair. I'm doing it, and I am going to keep an eye on you, and if you are as wise as I think you are you will leave Lake City without making another move. These clothes I have on you paid for. I have the money to reimburse you - take it."

"I can't conceive how anyone as low as you was when I picked you up can get so virtuous in two weeks, but you seem to be playing that part now, and one cannot be such an eminently respectable individual in rags, so give me credit in your next Sunday School address for that suit and consider the matter settled. You are entirely disinterested, of course, when you suggest that I leave town without making

another move. Permit me to say, however, that I will leave when I get good and ready."

"That is your business, not mine," said Mark, quietly.

"Thank you."

"My advice costs you nothing," added Mark.

"The only thing that has not cost me a pretty penny."

"Many a man who puts up a big bluff is a poor loser. You are inclined to whine, Mr. Flood. Allow me to say that I had an opportunity this afternoon to apologize to Miss Lane for my contemptible act at the Casino."

Flood grew pale, as he sat speechless for a time. With an expression of hatred he cried: "Get out of my sight, Mark Singleton, before I kill you."

"You wouldn't do anything so rash as that, I hope. That is one of your best jokes, Flood. You haven't nerve enough to assassinate me if I was asleep. I have listened patiently to your sarcasm and abuse of me. I deserve it, for being low enough to work for you, and therefore, do not resent it. When Neil Dare got through with you at the Casino, I understood you were blushing violently; if you get me warmed up thoroughly, you will find occasion to use arnica, or a lotion to reduce swelling. Now, having made our respective bluffs, let us bid each other a regretful farewell. Regretful, I think, is the word," and Mark turned his back upon him and leisurely left the hotel.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN.



HE telegram from the old fields was sent to Wliberton Vance, for he it was who wrote to the men, or the operating company, that desired possession of the doctor's farm. He told them that fifty thousand dollars would not be considered.

The little farm so long worthless was in the very center of the oil belt, or at least it was said to be. When the telegram came the doctor was with Standhope somewhere on the line of the road. Vance hoped that they would return that evening or the next morning, and sent a communication to the doctor's office telling him to get in touch with him at once on his return.

It was near midnight when the gentlemen returned, and the doctor did not go to his office. He was there early the next morning, however, and when he had read Vance's note, hurried to the office of the traction company. Naturally, there was no one about; it was much too early. The local trolley cars ran within three blocks of Vance's residence, and the impatient man thought the slowly passing minutes were hours.

His friend must have important news from the oil fields, or his summons would not have been so imperative. When at last he reached Vance's home, there was as little sign of life as at the office. A sharp ring brought a sleepy domestic. "Is Vance here?" he asked.

"In bed, I 'spose," she replied.

"Tell him I'm here."

"I don't happen to know who you are."

"Well, I'll have Vance introduce me some day. Tell him Dr. Harley is waiting to see him."

When the girl returned she said: "Mr. Vance says he will see you at his office at 8:30."

"At 8:30 and this is 6:30 — how am I going to wait two hours?"

"I don't know," she yawned, "shall I go and ask him?"

"You are an accommodating mortal, but I'll save you that trouble. I'll go up and see him myself."

"And lose me job? Well, hardly," and she shut the door in his face.

"Je — I wasn't going to say Jehoiakim, then — I suppose if it is good news it will keep," and he started back to his office.

The doctor was waiting at Vance's office before the time fixed upon, and when the latter arrived, promptly asked: "Well, what is the news? There is something or you wouldn't have left word."

"You know, I presume, that I wrote to them in your absence."

"I am aware of it."

"And that I held out for \$100,000?"

"Yes."

"They wired yesterday that—" and Vance slowly searched his pockets for a match. "Here is a match," exclaimed the doctor, trying without success to look unconcerned; "now, what do they say?"

"Where did I put that message? I thought I left it on my desk." He looked through a pile of papers with careful deliberation.

"You will lead me in the paths of unrighteousness in about a minute, Vance. Suppose you try to recall it from memory."

"Ah! here it is," said Vance complacently, as he handed the message to his old friend. The doctor was more excited than ever he had been in battle, at least he confessed to it afterward. His fingers trembled as he opened the envelope.

"At last," he murmured. There was suspicious moisture in the sharp, gray eyes. "At last," he repeated. Then turning to Vance, he asked: "What do you say? What will we do?"

"What do you say?"

"What do you think I'll say — what would you say, if all your life you had been poor, all your life you had put up the best fight you could and fate had elbowed you to one side — what would you say?"

"I think I'd say," replied Vance, gently, "that here goes for one hundred thousand, for rest, and peace and comfort."

"I'm so thankful that I won't swear, and my substitutes don't seem strong enough, so I'll adopt that old 'gag with Rip Van Winkle whiskers on it, and 'take up a collection.' The hat will be passed at once to Snyder and Blake, the oil operators."

"Right you are, doctor. Can you put your hand upon the deed, and such other papers as are needed?"

"I'll have them inside a half hour," said the doctor.

"Neil, get Drake on the line; tell him to come here as quickly as he receives the word, if possible."

"And, now what?"

"If Drake can spare the time, I suggest that he and you go at once. It is not so far that you cannot get back in two days, and I want Drake, because you might get the worst of it in some manner. You don't look out for Number One as closely as you should."

By this time Drake was waiting at the phone, and Vance asked him if he could leave the city for a day or two, and

when told that he could, the promoter asked as a personal favor that he come to the traction office at once.

When Drake learned that the doctor had been offered the handsome sum for his little farm he congratulated his old friend heartily.

"If they have the cash, we'll get it, doctor," he said, and arrangements were completed for an early departure.

Business connected with the road took Vance out of the city, and he, together with Drake and the doctor, left on the same train. Neil had change of affairs at the office. Mark Singleton reported early for duty; Vance, believing that if he kept the young man in his employ, he would not fall under the influence of Flood so easily, and he was needed to look after the men Flood was seeking to control.

Neil had adopted a wise course with Mark, treating him as a companion and friend. They discussed the plans for the day, and what might be accomplished during the absence of Mr. Vance.

Flood's last hope was a man named Haines, whom the doctor tried to bring into line, but without avail.

"I want to see this man myself," said Mark. "I talked him into this thing, and I want to talk him out of it."

"You are the one to do it then, and if you can accomplish it, it will be 'feather in both of our caps,' " said Neil.

Thus the work was arranged, and Mark hurried away.

Marion had just arrived that morning when the telephone bell rang and she answered the call. Neil heard her say: "Yes, Neil is here, shall I call him? Some one wishes to speak to you," she said, as a happy smile swept over her winsome face.

"Oh, is that you?" she heard him say. All the lines of care and worry were gone — only the lines lingered where smiles kept their vigils.

"I'm sure I'd be delighted. I am alone in the office, except Marion. Mr. Vance is gone, the doctor too, and Mark has just left, so your sister and I are running things here. Could you come down?" She heard him say. "If you will come down, we will put you in charge — and you can boss the office.

"And I will rebel, or run away," and Marion's eyes were dancing. She did not have to ask who was talking. She recognized the voice, although Norma had tried to disguise it when she found Marion, and not Neil, at the phone. Neil repeated Marion's threat, and added: "We will discharge her before Mr. Vance returns. Your sister will call upon us presently," Neil said as he replaced the receiver.

"It is very nice of you to say 'us,' even if it ain't quite correct," she beamed.

"But she said so just now," he persisted.

"She did not say a word about calling on us when I left her a half hour ago."

"You know how girls change their minds, sometimes," he said.

"I know, and sometimes we are very, very miserable, and sometimes very happy when girls change their minds," said the wise little maiden.

It will be recalled that when Flood was following Mark Singleton, he stopped in front of Vance's office and saw Norma and Neil talking as if there had been no coldness, no bitter hours, no going away. There had been, however, no understanding, and neither had there been reproaches. It was Mrs. Woodward who had induced Norma to accompany her that day. Norma had told her the story of Neil's wooing, of her faithlessness when Flood came. She spared not herself in the telling. She told of their open quarrel at the Elks' social, and what Neil had said.

"Perhaps it was not quite wise in him to say it, but he loved you, he was never faithless, and that, my dear, is

everything. I would welcome a quarrel with the man who loved me as he loved you, if that quarrel was because he was suffering from my neglect. If you meet Mr. Dare today, act just as you did before you ever saw that fickle man, who is trying to disown me. He loves no one but himself. From what you have told me concerning Mr. Dare, your happiness is his; your affection, if you have it to give, is ever most precious to him. The man who loves us for ourselves will make us happy. I want you to be happy. You have been so sweet and good to me I pray for your peace and happiness.

"As I said," she continued, "speak to him if opportunity presents, as if nothing had occurred, and see the light come back into his eyes, the glow of hope make him radiant again."

Thus it was, as if nothing had happened, Norma smiled upon him in the old way, and Neil could not believe it at first. He was speechless, fearing to speak to her, but her eyes were upon him and in their depths he saw no glint of frost. She saw in his fixed gaze a gleam of hope. She noted a new warmth in her heart as she saw the change sweep over him. She saw despair die—she saw the love light leap into his eyes—and she was content.

Since that hour when Flood looked in upon them they had not met. Marion, wise beyond her years, had said little to either of them, believing that time would heal the wounds fate had made.

"Marion, my little sister," Neil said, "I know you have an abundance of flowers at home, but you know the prettiest roses in the lawn there, and while I run away to get shaved and fixed up a bit, you gather the finest bouquet for Norma you can, maybe she will like it, coming from us."

"From us — yes from us — my big darling brother. Neil, are you going to be my really brother, you've got to be. I've called you brother so much, I won't have it any other way,

and no brother ever had a little sister who loved him more than I will love you."

"Dear little girl, when everything was dark to me, your faith and affection was like the gleam of a star whose light is eternal. When you gather those roses remember they are blushing because you are sweeter than they."

"That is delightful, Neil, but save that pretty speech for Norma, for I'll love you just the same — and I won't tell her either, if you do."

When Norma came, Marion pretended surprise, and asked why she did not tell her she was coming.

"I did not think I was coming to see you," Norma laughed.

"I am glad you came, anyway, you can see what busy people we are," said Marion.

"You seem to be rushed somewhat this morning."

"I gathered all these roses for Neil, at least."

"You gathered those roses for your sister," Neil remarked.

"But, at your command."

"Is that the proper word — command?" he asked.

"I heard you tell Norma over the phone that if she came she could boss the place, so please give the boss your roses," and Marion placed the bouquet in his hands.

"They were gathered for you, Norma, not that you are without these fragrant Children of Earth, but these are meant as a peace offering laid upon the altar of hope."

"Is a peace offering needed?" Norma asked.

"The Patriarchs had burnt offerings — sometimes they were peace offerings — and sometimes they were expressions of faith and thankfulness."

"And these are meant—" and Norma paused, her cheeks taking on the tint of the roses.

"And these are meant," he repeated, "as a covenant."

"A covenant?" Norma turned toward the desk where Marion had been but a moment before — Marion was not

there. Silently she had slipped away and left these two together; of all the world she loved them most. Perhaps — but that was not yet — now, at least, her thought was wrapped in these, and with throbbing heart and half-filled eyes, she had disappeared as silently as sun rays go when clouds intervene. In such a moment as came to these — Neil and Norma — pausing on the threshold of happiness, lips fail to utter what the heart is prompting.

"Norma," he said, his gaze not upon her who filled the foreground of each thought picture, but at the distant hills, the green, wooded hills where the birds were wooing, and telling their loves in song. "Norma, I told Marion when she went to gather those flowers that she would find the roses blushing because she was fairer than they, so I say to you—accept my offering, be it what it may, and in their bloom you see yourself—in their fragrance what I hope for."

"You are always saying nicer things to Marion than to me," she pouted.

"I do not mean to. I say things to her because she is your sister."

"And because she deserves them more than I." She saw his unspoken protest, and continued: "Yes, Neil, she does. When I was faithless, she was true. The man who came between us is dead. Not in a literal sense, but dead to me. If I were gone from out your sight, you would turn to Marion. It would be easy for you to love her."

"I love her now," he interrupted, "and I want her always as my sister, even as I want you — to be my wife."

Her face was buried in the mass of roses. He could not read what might have been plain, but for the flowers that stood as woman's defense in the moment of her trembling. "Neil, you can't love me now, when you remember that I went away, as I told you—"

"But you are back now, dear," he said, tenderly. "Norma, haven't you come back? I have loved you all the time — I will love you on after my tongue is silent, after my lips are sealed, after my eyes are closed."

"Oh, Neil, don't. I can't think of that hour, not now, Neil, not now."

In a moment she was in his arms. In a moment her red, passionate lips were answering his.

The soft eyes that looked on were wet, but each tear that fell was such a happy tear that the angel who waits to record the loves of earth caught them up to keep for a remembrance.

Even in their new found happiness they felt her presence, rather than saw it.

"You here?" they both exclaimed.

"Yes, why not? I've been out there telling the roses to put up their sweet, silent prayers to Heaven for this moment—and they did."



## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN.

ORMA had told Neil of the proposed meeting with Flood, and how Mrs. Woodward should appear at the proper moment. Neil requested that the meeting occur on Saturday afternoon, for Norma had asked him to be present. "I want you near me,"

she had said, "and I wish it were possible that you could hear what we shall say, but you will be with Mrs. Woodward, and remain out of his sight until I signal."

Thus it was arranged, and as Flood was expecting the interview to be that afternoon, Norma sent word that circumstances compelled her to defer her coming until Saturday.

Flood was disappointed and expressed his disapproval in a note that was unusually dictatorial.

"I am not only surprised, but annoyed that you should take it upon yourself to postpone a meeting for which I have made special arrangements," he wrote. "I may not always be so complacent and you may realize some day that you will be happier by deferring to me occasionally. This one time I will yield to your whim."

Norma placed the communication in Mrs. Woodward's hands, and when the deserted wife had read it, exclaimed: "How like him that is. His selfish nature shows in every line."

"I have just thought of something," Norma said, "something that will send a chill through him if we can manage to get the letter posted. If the idea meets your approval, we

will consult Neil; he will find a way to accomplish it." Norma then explained how a letter from her, Mrs. Woodward, be sent him, and the letter be posted in a city quite remote from New York. The letter should say that from an unexpected source you had received money and was visiting friends, and that you had decided to accept his offer, and was now awaiting the thousand dollars he had agreed to give you.

The plan met the approval of Mrs. Woodward, and they set out immediately to see Neil, and get his views upon the subject. Neil promptly endorsed the idea and told how a friend whom he could trust lived in Columbus, Ohio, and the letter bearing the post mark of that city, would leave him wondering what it all meant. The missive should be sent at once, and he would write his friend to post immediately the enclosed letter to the person addressed.

Jointly they indicted the following:

COLUMBUS, O., June 26, 19——.

Mr. Kennedy Woodward, alias Cyrus Flood:

My Dear Sir — I can no longer address you as my dear husband, although husband you are, as yet. I pity the young woman you say is waiting to marry you. How little she knows of you, and how quickly she will regret her great mistake. Poor girl, she will learn all too soon that you are not what you pretend.

A dear friend lives here, and she has asked me to make her home my home, and now I wait for you to keep your word with me. The thousand you promised, if I will apply for a divorce, must reach me soon or I will visit Lake City in the very near future.

You are doubtless wondering how I have money enough to travel and visit. It came in a most unexepected manner—a friend I had forgotten—I might say, but a friend, nevertheless.

"I will look for a letter at once — address general delivery, postoffice, Col. O.

Jessie."

"That is all right," said Neil. "The letter I have written tells just enough to cause my friend 'Billy' to act promptly."

A special delivery stamp was affixed and the letter posted. "This will reach Flood tomorrow evening, and put him in humor for the interview with Norma," and Neil's trustful smile showed that perfect confidence in the girl he loved, the confidence the sex demands.

Standhope was waiting for Vance when he returned, and after brief instructions to Neil in regard to certain work, hastily left in company with Standhope, announcing their return in time to meet the doctor and Drake.

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

It was not Drake's purpose to make known their presence on their arrival at the oil fields. He impressed upon the doctor the importance of getting a knowledge of the situation. Ostensibly they were there to secure oil lands rather than to sell. They soon found that few were trying to sell, but many were seeking to lease or buy the farms that once were considered comparatively worthless.

Drake did the talking, while the doctor appeared in the role of a capitalist looking for an opportunity to invest in oil lands. In this guise he was able to look over his farm for the first time.

When they came to the office of the man who had offered \$100,000 for the farm, Drake remained in the background while the doctor made inquiries in regard to the possibilities of purchasing or leasing a place known as the Harley property.

"The man who owns that place lives in or near Chicago," said the agent, unblushingly.

"I would like to meet him and talk over matters," said the doctor with assumed indifference.

"If you have money enough you can get it tomorrow, perhaps. Our company expects to close with the man today," was the reply.

"Will one hundred and fifty thousand be any inducement?" he asked.

"It might have been yesterday, but it is worth more today."

"Well, why I'd like to know?"

"Doubtless you would like to know, but that is our business. We had trouble in locating the man. We found him. You might drop in tomorrow with a certified check, and we will talk it over."

"I'll see you again," said the doctor, and he soon rejoined Drake.

In the meantime Drake had not been idle. He found a man who was willing to talk, and he, too, had been trying to get trace of the much-wanted Dr. Harley.

"I would give a handsome sum for the place, if I can get him before the Standard gets its long fingers upon him. I'll make a thousand a day."

"I've been making inquiries about this Dr. Harley," said Drake, "and I have got trace of him ."

"The devil you say?" exclaimed the oil man, "do you expect to buy?"

"I have not the money to do it or I would, but I'm here to earn a few dollars if I can legitimately."

"There is five thousand in it for you if you lead me to Harley and he takes my offer."

"Will you give me an idea what that offer will be?" asked Drake, coolly.

"We don't do business that way in this neighborhood, but I might offer \$80,000."

"I am told he has been offered more."

"Don't let us beat around the bush in this manner. As the boys say, 'I'm from Missouri,' show me and I'll talk business."

"I'll be frank with you — I'm Dr. Harley's agent, with power to sell. I'll say, however, that money talks. It must be certified check or New York draft."

"That part is all right, but I want to see the deed. I want to know that the land is mine when I pay for it."

"A clear title will pass into the hands of the man who buys when his check is shown to be as safe as Harley's documents."

"The deed is recorded in the county seat, I suppose?"

"It is," said Drake. "I must see some one else, however. Let me say frankly, that Snyder & Blake have offered more than you, and I came here to close with them. My meeting you was accidental. I am here to do my best for a man who is as honest as he is poor. It matters not whether it is Snyder & Blake, or you, Mr. ——"

"Calligan, of Pittsburg," said the man.

"Well, Mr. Calligan, you have the truth, at last, all but one fact — Dr. Harley is here. I can get him in ten minutes."

"Get him." The grim, firm mouth shut like a steel strap. "Let me say, I know Snyder & Blake; they are all right, they will do what they say, but you'll wait for the money. They will pay it, never fear, and if you are not in any hurry for the cash they are as good as anyone. I don't like to knock, but these are facts."

"Here comes Dr. Harley now," said Drake.

"I've been trying to buy my place, but I find that prices have advanced on me," said the doctor, a merry twinkle in his eyes.

"Dr. Harley, Mr. Calligan, of Pittsburg."

"Buying or selling?" The doctor's affluent appearance belied him.

"I'm trying to buy your farm. I'm going to town. You have ten minutes to make up your mind," said Calligan.

"You are as laconic as 'Finnegan,' " replied the doctor.

"Who the h-1 is Finnegan?" asked Calligan.

"I couldn't tell you in ten minutes, and it don't matter anyway — he wasn't in the oil business. What is your offer?"

"I offered this gentleman \$5,000 to put me next to Dr. Harley. That offer goes, providing—"

"Providing what?" asked the doctor.

"That you want to take a hundred thousand for your farm."

"Cash?"

"Cash."

"We go to town, Drake."

"What about Snyder & Blake?" asked the lawyer.

"It is their misfortune that they wasn't looking when the hammer dropped," replied the doctor.

When all the details were completed and the draft was put away in reverent awe in the old man's worn pocket book, the man from Pittsburg said: "Tell me about that Mick, Finnegan."

"Oh, he was the man," laughed the doctor, "the old section boss, or something of that kind, who sent in the shortest report of a wreck on record. 'Off again — on again — gone again, Finnegan.'"

"If you run across the fellow, tell him he can get a job from me — Calligan."

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN.

I \*\*\*

T WAS Harold Brady who wrote the story of the oil find on the farm owned by Dr. Harley. He took occasion to tell how the doctor, ever generous and ever considerate to the poor, remained poor himself because he failed to press his patients for

services rendered or caused them annoyance by presentation of bills each month.

He told how the farm came to be in the doctor's possession, and how, sometimes, it became a burden to him instead of a source of income. Succinctly he related the story of its purchase by the Pittsburg oil man.

The newspaper congratulations were re-echoed by citizens of Lake City, who if they knew the worthy doctor, had not made the knowledge manifest. In homes where the name of Jno. P. Harley was as one who had never been, he was spoken of as a most estimable man, and one whose wide knowledge as a practitioner placed him at the very front of his profession. Lake City was not unlike other cities.

The fortune, which would be considered unworthy of mention in the greater cities of the country, was one that loomed up mightily in a town where great fortunes were unknown. Had this sum been acquired, dollar by dollar, and by hard-fisted methods, it might not have attracted special attention even in Lake City, but it came all unexpected, and he who had received but scant attention and few honors at once stepped into the lime light of the little city.

Outside of a few devoted friends who knew him, it was old Doc. Harley, but Dr. Jno. P. Harley, the man with the

hundred thousand, was deemed worthy of all consideration. Some who had never mentioned his name before were pleased to relate marvelous cures and most intricate and wonderful operations.

It was over at his old home — Eden, however, that it assumed the miraculous. Here it was looked upon as a special act of Providence. The escape of the Children of Israel from Egypt was now an event of ordinary moment. When Joshua stayed the sun on its majestic course, he had demonstrated what man might do with Omnipotence at his side, but here was Doc. John, an old friend, who found no night too dark, or blast too bitter when suffering called him — and he had been singled out by the Holy Power that moves the universe for special consideration. Old Doc. John, no longer poor — miracle of miracles.

Neighbors of Abe Thomas were wont to drop in after the evening chores were done, and talk it over.

"Abe, have you seen him since?" one would ask.

"Do you reckon he'll buy one of them 'toot wagons' now that he's rich?" another would wonder.

"I haven't seen him," Abe would answer, "but one of these days he'll come ridin' along jist like he uster — the same old slouch hat, an' the same old long tailed coat, an' the same old smile. Nebicudneezer that seen the hand-writin' on the wall an' was told that he had been weighed in a balance an' found wantin' was turned out on pastur' for his pride, but old Doc. John will keep on a eatin' chicken with us, and bring down the scales as he uster."

It is getting ahead of the story, perhaps, but one day he came riding down the road on his bald-faced pacing mare, and not only Abe and his family came out on the porch to show him that they were at home, but the near neighbors saw him and answered the friendly wave of his hand. Work was over for that day, or at least as long as the doctor remained. The

smart new suit he wore in the city, that made him look ten years younger, was put away in the new clothes press he had bought. He came dressed as Abe had predicted. He had made the excuse to himself that the mare was still shedding and his new suit would be half ruined, but he knew that it would not be their old friend that was coming if he put away the old suit.

"Well, I'll just bet fifty cents, Sister Thomas," he said in his breezy, familiar way, "that I'm in time for dinner, and some of that cold ham of yours will fill an 'aching void,' as the preacher says."

"You'll git your dinner, Doc. John — I — I— should say Dr. Harley," she stammered.

"Malinda Thomas, if I ever hear you putting on airs with me again, I'll give you such a dose the next time you call me that you won't be able to lift your head off the pillow for a week," he said.

"She began to laugh, but when her lips trembled in spite of her she answered huskily: "The Lord didn't let you make a fool of yourself, an' I praise His Holy Name."

"Amen to that, Malinda," and the old slouch hat was lifted reverently.

"You used to like a bowl of bread and milk, Doc., an' if you'll have some to kind of stay you till dinner's ready, it will be right there on the kitchen table. Abe was so slow a gettin' the chicken, I hain't got it picked yet," she said.

"Never mind the chicken," replied the doctor. "I came to take pot luck with you." He had observed the anxious look that came into Abe's honest face, and he rightly guessed that no chicken had been caught yet.

"Dave," said the farmer to his hired man, "take Doc.'s horse to the barn and feed it, an' then help mother with the chicken."

The doctor availed himself of the invitation to partake of the rich milk and the generous slices of sweet, white bread baked in the big oven back of the kitchen. Then long after the time for the farm dinner he delighted the heart of the good woman by his onslaught upon her delicious little biscuit, and all the good things she knew so well how to prepare. She knew what he liked best and they were all before him in bewildering abundance.

"I just had to come out and get one of your dinners, Mrs. Thomas. I've been eating at the hotel, and some way, they leave something out of every dish and you have that something in, so that I am forced to sit here and growl at my stomach for its miserly way of shutting me off when I want, at least, a spoonful of every blessed good thing you have here."

"Dear me, Doc, I wish you'd try an' eat somethin'."

"I've eaten enough now to make a famine in town," he said, and thus delighted the generous soul that had provided so bountifully.

"I want you to be sure and come Thanksgivin', for the turkeys have done well this summer — come whether the road is ready or not — you know the way. Speakin' about the road," continued Mrs. Thomas, "I was sayin' to Abe last night, sez I, I'll jist bet a hen egg that Doc John will lay that fortune of his at the feet of Mr. Vance, for he's so everlastin' free-hearted. An' I said to Abe, too, that it jist seemed as the Lord wouldn't let that road run through this farm till Doc had a hand in it. I believe that was settled when the foundations of the earth was laid."

"That is pretty strong foreordination, Sister Thomas," the doctor answered.

One or two of the neighbors called that afternoon, and insisted that he stay all night in the neighborhood, as his old friends would like to meet him again and talk about the won-

derful fortune that came to him, and finally he consented, when Abe said: "I want him to stay all night here, and I'll send Dave around to tell a few of the folks to come in this evenin'."

The neighbors needed no urging and when night had come, the sitting room was filled and the porch also.

In simple, halting, but heartfelt words they congratulated Doctor John, and wished him well with his money. They remembered how when sickness fell upon them he came bringing cheer and hope in his face. They recalled how he was wont to join in their merry-makings, and how he was the jolliest one at their weddings.

Old Grandmother Spencer, a devout woman, was there—one of her grandsons brought her over in the carriage. "I had to come, too," she piped, her shrill treble trembling, quavering, as the voice of the aged halt in song. "I had to come an' tell you how glad I am. I know very well what you have done for us an' how poorly we have paid you, often—"

"Don't, grandmother," he broke in.

"Yes, I will say it. You know the Master said — an' you never professed Him, Doc John — 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these, ye did it unto me,' an' that's what you did all your life; an' it jest seemed to me as if the Lord said: 'If these people over there at Eden won't pay him, I will,' and He sent the oil to your little farm. He will try you out a while, jest to see if you will be like you used to — plain and manlike. The Presidin' Elder said yesteday he wished he could lead Doctor John Harley into the Kingdom."

"Grandmother! I'd rather have your feeble old hand guiding me into the paths of eternal peace than these men. Your faith is sweeter, your life less selfish," said the doctor with deep emotion.

"Let me tell you a story," he continued, "a true story, and while it happened away off from here where the winters are long and dreary, when I heard it it appealed to me, for it explains my faith, my religion. Like this old fellow in my story, a man may have his hours of weakness, but if he laughed at the cannon as it roared at him, I want to take his hand.

"The story concerns two men and two little children. A man known as Captain Tuttle was one, and old Si Smith was the other. Si had been a good soldier, only sometimes, when he could get liquor, then he had a season at the guard house or a stunt at carrying a rail. Si had two children — a boy and a girl. The boy, the elder of the two, was only 10 years of age when the tragedy occurred. Smith lived a mile or two from the home of Captain Tuttle. The mother of these little ones had gone to rest and Si was letting the children grow up in that little humble home, near an inland lake, uncared for, uncombed and unkempt. When he was sober for any length of time, and these occasions came, he had some neighbor woman prepare clothes for them. In summer, however, particularly when he spent days and nights in the groggery near by, they amused themselves much like the pickaninnies of the plantations before the war.

"One cold winter night Si said: 'Go to bed, children, and let the fire go out in the stove, mebby I won't be home 'fore 11.' The country saloon was on the other side of the lake, which was frozen over. The old fellow reached the saloon, but did not stay as long as he intended. It was told afterward that he did not drink as much as usual and was fairly sober when he started back home. When near midway over the lake he slipped and fell. In the light coating of snow could be seen the marks where he had struggled to get to his feet. It was useless. His leg was broken. He doubtless called for help, but no human ear caught the cry. In the

home, where the windows were broken and in which old clothes were stuffed to keep out the cold, the children were nestling close to each other to keep warm. They were fast asleep; they heard no cry.

"The night was very cold and the helpless man knew that the end was at hand.

"A day passed and the little ones were waiting. All that they could find to eat was soon made away with, and when they grew hungry the boy found his way, as best as he could, to the home of Captain Tuttle. He told how they were left alone. The lad said he and his sister were hungry, and while the Captain was getting ready to look for the poor 'bum' of a father, Mrs. Tuttle fed the hungry boy and prepared a basket of food for the little girl.

"It was not long until the body of the old soldier was found. The snow had drifted over him. Nature had wrapped him in its own white sheet. The captain decided that the funeral would be held from his home - more of the neighbors might come in. He had purchased the casket and had him decently prepared for burial. Then he called upon a minister near by to come and offer a prayer and say a few words to those who might care to pay respect to the memory of - not the poor, neighborhood drunkard - but the soldier who had stood up as brave as the bravest on many a battlefield. The minister was sorry, but he had an engagement which prevented. Captain Tuttle sought another, but he said he was really too ill to go such a stormy day. So it was that when the hour come and the neighbors were gathered in the sitting-room where the veteran lay asleep, the captain arose and cleared his throat once or twice. He had been sitting beside the little boy and girl. The little fat hand of the girl rested tightly in the hand of her brother. He had noticed this. When he attempted to speak he could not say anything at first.

"'My neighbors,' he said, finally, 'the most of you knew old Si; the most of you knew little that you could say in his praise. He is lying there silent; he can't make any excuse for himself; he has told his story ere this, perhaps, to his Savior, who, I have faith to believe, is more merciful than some of His servants who refused to come here today and say a word or offer prayer. His failings, and they were many, I leave with God. I wish to ask you, my neighbors, if you ever had any hard work to do—behind the threshing machine, butchering in the stormiest days of winter, putting away your hay in the mow the hottest days of summer and you needed Si, did he ever, I ask you, refuse to come? Where the hardest and most undesirable work on the farm was to be done, there you found Si.

"'I knew him, my friends, at his best. I saw him stand at Chickamauga, right out in front of the line, fighting like a demon; I saw him on the Atlanta campaign, where we all grew tired of fighting — that hundred days of battle and of hardship. He never went to sick call; but the bugle never sounded or the long roll beat that Si was not in line ready for duty. I wish he had been as ready to go on this, his last trip, his last march. May we not hope, though, that even a sinner like Si, may find rest after the marches, and the fighting."

"When the neighbors had wiped the tears out of their eyes and looked down into the white, peaceful face, they knew that the ministers who could not come were not needed.

"The children were taken to the home of the captain. He and his good wife were getting along in years, and so they decided that they would find homes for the homeless little ones. The boy was placed first. Then, one day, a hard-visaged woman came and said she had a place for the little girl. She made an effort to say kindly things to the child, who opened her big eyes, as she crawled under the shelter of John

Tuttle's arms and looked at the woman as one looks at a snake. 'Just leave her; I'll bring her over tomorrow,' Tuttle said. Mrs. Tuttle went along and the little one sat between them, holding tightly to Mrs. Tuttle's hand. All the child's belongings were folded and fastened in a red handkerchief. The captain took her hand and carried the bundle to the house.

"'Well, you've come, have you?' said the woman, with an attempt to be pleasant. The captain had handed the bundle to the child, who held fast to it. Then he said good-bye and turned away. When he got into the carriage he saw a pathetic little figure at the closed gate. In her hand was the bundle, and her lips were quivering. She made no outcry, but that appealing look in her eyes hurt the old soldier like a bayonet thrust. He drove on. Occasionally he looked back and the child was still at the gate looking after them. When they came to the forks of the road, where he turned toward the city, the old gray mare he was driving fell flat on her side — fell as if she had been shot.

"Captain Tuttle sprang from the carriage. He helped the mare to her feet and looked for the stone or whatever it might have been that caused the animal to fall. He could discover nothing. As quickly as he could he turned back toward the house they had just left.

- "'What are you going to do, John?' his wife asked.
- "'I'm going to obey God, of course,' he replied.
- "'What do you mean?"
- "'Don't I know when He tells me through that surefooted old mare to do my duty? There wasn't a thing there to make her fall. God Almighty said, just as plainly to me as He could speak, "John Tuttle, I saved your life in many a danger and I brought you home, are you going to leave that little orphan girl with that woman?"

"'Tomorrow I'm going after the boy and then we will go to the probate judge and they will be ours, wife."

"The child was yet standing at the gate when they drew near. She looked up at him through tears and a smile broke on the quivering lips. He opened the gate. 'Come on, dear,' he said. She sprang into his arms. He did not even go to the house to say to the woman that he had changed his mind.

"All the way home he drove with one hand. His left arm was about the child. Long before they reached home she was asleep, her head resting on a great, loving heart."

The doctor's story ended, they said good-night, these old friends, and he and Abe followed them into the yard, and watched them go away. The doctor sat on the porch smoking and dreaming of the night — of these simple folk with hearts of gold — while Mrs. Thomas went to a drawer and took therefrom a quilt of many pieces that had taken the premium at the county fair. It had never been used.

"It seems to be blowin' up from the north and Doc John might get chilly in the night," she said.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN.

T was Saturday morning. Norma, while not given to fits of depression, confessed to an attack of the nerves over the anticipated meeting with Flood. Mrs. Flood or Mrs. Woodward — to each name she answered with protest — was not in the

least agitated. "Some day," she said to Norma, "it will be the old name I bore in childhood, the name I love, Jessie Carrolton." Her grandfather was a famous man in his day—a Virginian with a Virginian's pride of family and state. Reverses came; her father died in early manhood, and the young girl helped her mother bear life's burden until death beckoned.

There was not much money left when Flood, or Woodward, came, but it was not long until all she had was dissipated, and then this gilded dragon fly of a husband fluttered away.

They discussed the coming meeting at two o'clock that afternoon, and planned what they would do and say. Norma and Mrs. Woodward were not the only persons in Lake City who were looking forward to that meeting. There were Wilberton Vance, Neil Dare, Dr. Harley and Foxhall Standhope, who felt certain that they would be needed. These gentlemen were all in Vance's office that forenoon, and they were there when Mark Singleton came in with the report that Haines was in the city and was closeted with Flood—at least he could not be seen.

"Will any of you gentlemen be at the Casino this afternoon?" he asked. Each one present signified his intention of being a guest of that resort during a portion of the afternoon, at least.

"While there are enough without me, I think I had better go, too," Mark said. "I had dealings with Haines, and if worst comes to worst, I will deal with him again, but in a manner none of you might care to indulge in."

"What do you mean, Mark?" asked Vance.

"Haines is a very determined old fellow. If Flood has given him money enough he will do anything asked of him."

"But the Court House will be deserted this afternoon," remarked the doctor.

"It is not a difficult matter to get the proper official when he is needed, and I'll venture to guess Flood has everything arranged. I had better be present, Mr. Vance, if you have nothing special on hand."

"Certainly, Mark. We will all be there, and if this delegation cannot cope with one man we had better go into retirement," replied Vance.

While they were discussing the possibilities of an injunction Drake came in.

"What! have I broke in on a secret caucus?" he asked.

"You find assembled here a lot of poor orphans, supposed to be at the mercy of a merciless individual by the name of Flood," answered the doctor.

"Anything new developed?" Drake asked.

"Not as yet, but we are looking for something," and Vance indicated by a gesture that the lawyer should join the conference.

The situation was gone over carefully, and the fact that Haines was in the city but could not be located was considered ominous.

"Vance," said Drake, sharply, "come with me, we know where to find the judges. We will put the matter to them squarely. Any action brought in the usual way can be cared for in due time, but we must, if possible avoid injunction proceedings. Let Mark or Neil, or both of them, keep an eye upon Flood and Haines. It is well that we know every move they make. You can do no good sitting here."

"The advice is excellent," said Vance. "Let us act on it at once."

As Mark had said, Haines was in the city, and while the conference was being held at Vance's office, Flood, Haines and an attorney were in consultation at the hotel. Flood anticipated that Vance or some of his friends would be at the Casino when Norma came. He was of the opinion that Norma would tell Neil of the approaching interview. This was occasioned by the friendly manner in which their conversation was conducted, as witnessed by him the day he followed Mark Singleton. He began to fear that Norma's request for an interview Saturday afternoon might mean an unpleasant scene, particularly if Neil should put in an appearance.

Now that she seemed indifferent toward him, as shown by her note, he was all the more determined to win her. He had fully made up his mind that she should leave the city with him as soon as Haines brought suit. The letter from his wife had left him much disturbed.

Flood told his attorney that he had an appointment with a friend at 2 P. M. and that he would, in all probability, be watched by Vance or some of his friends. The mere fact, he argued, of his presence at the Casino would lead Vance, and particularly Mark Singleton, whom he feared most, to the conclusion that nothing would be done at the Court House. Haines and the attorney could then proceed with the plan they had agreed upon.

Flood thought it would be prudent to have Haines go with him to the Casino. Thus, if Vance's friends were upon the lookout, this would completely mystify them as far as action in the court was concerned.

The attorney was in favor of immediate action, but Flood was of the opinion that Vance, who stood high in the estimation of the public, would take some step, not only to frustrate them, but in some way interfere with the interview he had arranged for two o'clock.

It was Flood's purpose to keep Haines in sight all the time. The attorney was to take charge of him, when he could not, but Haines had some purchases to make, and while the attorney and Flood were discussing some features of the case, got away from them.

When the gentlemen who were in conference at Vance's office separated, Dr. Harley and Foxhall Standhope sauntered leisurely into the business district. The doctor knew Haines by sight, and as they turned into the main business street, he recognized the farmer, who was gazing at a store window.

"Hist," he said softly, "there is Haines. We must not let him get out of sight."

Haines went into the store, while the doctor and Standhope crossed to the opposite side, where they could see him when he came out.

"I will tell you what we will do," said the doctor. "We, or rather you, as he may know me, had best meet him when he is through in there, and make an offer on his farm. I am willing to pay a good stiff price for it. I am able to own it, and Haines out of the way, Vance will have no further trouble. The road must go through the farm, and if he remains obdurate it means trouble some time."

"How much am I to offer for the farm, if he will listen to the proposition?" asked Standhope.

"It is not worth \$9,000, but I will give that much. Offer him seven thousand and slowly advance until the nine thousand limit is reached."

When Haines made his appearance, Standhope approached him, saying: "This is Mr. Haines, I believe."

"That is my name."

"I don't wish to detain you, but I understand your farm is for sale."

"Who told you it was?" asked the farmer, sharply.

Standhope hesitated a moment. "I think it was — well, it does not matter who told me. Sometimes we business men find it prudent not to mention names."

"What business are you in?"

"Real estate business just at present, but getting back to the question: What will you take for your farm?"

"Forty thousand dollars," said the countryman, calmly.

"There must be a gold mine on it, or valuable coal deposits," replied Standhope, with a contemptuous laugh.

"You don't have to buy it. Now let me say something real plain to you. If you are one of them fellows with a box full of money that turns out to be saw dust when you look at it at home, you are barking up the wrong tree. I'm not so green as you take me."

"I see you are not. If my money turned out to be saw dust, as you say, I suppose I could pick up your farm when you wasn't looking and make off with it."

Haines was not oblivious to the sarcasm and inquired: "What is your game, anyway?"

"My game is, that there are seven thousand dollars in the First National bank, that you can call yours when I get a clear title to your farm."

"What do you want of it?"

"I want to own it."

"You don't want it very bad, do you?"

"I've offered you a fair price," said Standhope.

"In your opinion, maybe, but not in mine."

"What will you take?"

"I told you."

"That is a joke," said Standhope.

"Well, jist count the whole thing a joke and let it go."

"I'll give you \$8,000."

"Kind of crawlin' up a little, ain't you?"

"As a negro would say, 'I've done crawled.'"

"Then I'll bid you good mornin'," said the farmer cheerfully.

"I'll give you \$8,500," and Standhope scowled as in fierce anger.

"As you said jist now, 'that's a joke.' "

"Good-bye, Mr. - Hey?"

"Standhope."

"What! Standhope, the feller Flood's a cussin' for buttin' in?"

"Is Flood saying unkind things of me?"

"Sounds like a camp meetin' revival when he gits started."

"You are leaning on a broken reed, Mr. Haines. Get over on the right side."

"That broken reed had the price, an' it's in my name at the bank. The farm ain't for sale today, M r.——"

The farmer turned and walked away. Standhope reported to the doctor. "He wanted forty thousand, did he? As I said, the farm might be worth \$9,000, but if I thought Vance had to have that farm, I'd give forty thousand."

"Doctor, you will pardon me for even suggesting what Vance would say if he heard you."

"What's that?"

"You have heard the old adage, doubtless."

"Oh, about the 'fool and his money;' yes, I've heard it, and I suppose Vance would put it that way."

"Don't worry about Vance. I think this afternoon will finish Flood's usefulness to the company back of him, and I communicated with the office. They know the situation here. The home office has left it to me whether to arrest him if your State laws permit, or get a paid interview in the paper, showing Flood's fraudulent pretentions."

"Use the newspaper," said the doctor. "And lay it on thick. Lash him in every line. He's thin skinned, you can see that. When the blood comes, he will buy a ticket for New York.

Neil and Mark had kept watch upon the Court House, but no one had attempted trouble there. Neil returned to the office and Mark decided to drop into the hotel and keep watch on movements there.

When Drake learned that Mrs. Woodward was to accompany Norma that afternoon, and that she would confront her husband, he determined to accompany them. While there would be other gentlemen present, to protect, not only Norma, but Mrs. Woodward, if protection should be needed, he felt that having induced her to accompany him to Lake City it was his special duty to see that even her husband should not insult her. It was Drake who suggested that Mrs. Woodward remain under his care, that Flood should not see her until such time as Norma would require her presence. It was Norma's plan for Neil to go with Mrs. Woodward, but this was quite satisfactory.

As the office of the Traction Company would be closed that afternoon, Marion would accompany them and she and Norma would precede the others, while one by one the gentlemen were to find their way to the park.

Neil and Mark were first to reach the Casino, and the manager knowing Neil well invited him into his private office. Here Neil told the story of Flood and Norma, much of which the manager knew, but one statement Neil made surprised him not a little. That Flood should masquerade as a single man was bad enough, but the little plot to make the acquaint-ance of Norma, after he had refused to be a party to an introduction, left him astounded and indignant.

"I wish I had known it," he said, his eyes flashing. "I wish I could have known it that day; his exit from the park would have been a speedy one."

"The young man who played the decoy or second villain in the farce, is here today, and is with us."

"What! Mark Singleton, with you - how is that?"

"Vance took him up when shame and remorse overwhelmed him as his mother breathed her last. Since that time Mark Singleton has been a different person, and he has proven himself a valuable man to Mr. Vance."

"If the death of the mother redeems the son, few need sorrow that she died," said the manager, and Neil felt the note of sadness in his voice. He remembered that the brother had buried his mother but a short time before, and whether it be boy or man, the mother is missed and mourned, if that boy or man be worthy of the consideration of his fellow man.

"I have mentioned the fact that the wife of the contemptible scoundrel whom we will run down this afternoon is in the city," said Neil. "She will be here soon with Mr. Drake, and if it is not interfering or imposing upon you, I would ask that she might remain until wanted, either here, or in another apartment, where Flood may not stumble upon her, before the time. Before the time," he continued, "for the time will arrive soon when accounts will be squared with him. His offer to give her one thousand dollars if she secures a divorce that he may marry Norma Lane, puts him beyond that pale where men are accorded decent treatment. If he is capable of feeling shame, that sensation will be his experience this afternoon."

It was not long after this that Norma and Marion arrived, and strolling down the long veranda took seats apart from the crowd that was gathering. Presently they saw Flood approach and with him was the farmer, Haines. Who the countryman was they did not know, but they observed the men separate and Flood came directly toward them. Haines was directing his steps toward the gate that led to the railway, when Mark Singleton, who with Vance had been watching for this move on the part of the farmer, hurriedly intercepted him.

"Hello, Haines," said Mark, cheerily, "I have not seen you for some time. I imagined you would look me up when you came to town."

"Why should I look you up?"

"I am the man who discovered you, am I not?"

"You discovered me on my farm where I wasn't lost, if I know anything about it."

"You are getting lost now, ain't you?" and Mark placed himself in front of the man.

"What makes you think so?"

"You want to see the show, don't you?"

"If I do, I know how to see it, and I have the price, too."

"There is no doubt of that. How much did he give you?"

"How much did who give me?" asked the farmer, bridling and scowling.

"Flood," answered Mark.

"I can't see what business that is of yours."

"I might make it my business."

"Get away, I don't want to talk to you."

Mark observed that Dr. Harley had joined Vance, and both were intently watching the interview.

Had Flood known Mark's purpose in stopping the farmer he might have interfered, but he was sitting with his back toward them. The doctor suddenly left Vance's side and started toward the Casino. He had not been gone but a few moments, when he and the park policeman appeared. Presently they joined Vance, who was partly hidden by the shrubbery. Mark was alert, and catching sight of the group, took the farmer by the arm in a friendly manner apparently asking him to sit down and talk over matters.

"I've nothing to say to you," and Haines angrily drew away. Giving Mark a sudden jerk he attempted to leave the grounds. Mark was in front of him in a moment, and placing his hands upon Haines' shoulders stopped him, and in no easy manner. Haines, who was stockily built, and by no means cowardly, resented this act, and shutting his fist drew back as if to strike.

"You are not getting sore, are you?" he asked.

"Get out of my way or I'll mash you," cried Haines, angrily.

As this was what Mark most desired, the young man touched Haines lightly on the cheek with his open hand. Haines glared at him savagely. "You might go back of the monkey house there and take a few lessons before you smash me. It is an appropriate place for you, for Flood has been making a 'monkey' of you ever since you came to town."

Haines' temper got the best of him, for Mark had taken hold of him again. "Let go of me, you dirty thief," he cried as he struck viciously. Mark easily warded off the blow.

"Oh! that is what you want, is it? Well, help yourself," and Mark delivered a well-directed blow that started Haines' nose bleeding. Singleton heard the officer as he ran toward them.

"You are under arrest, both of you," said the policeman.

"I'm not guilty," cried the farmer.

"Tell that to the judge," answered the officer. "Don't make any resistance or I'll put the nippers on you."

Haines stood glaring at the group, for Vance and the doctor drew near.

"Did he attack you, Mark?" asked Vance, solicitiously.

"Yes, I tried to get him to talk matters over quietly, but—"

"I am in a hurry to get to town," said Haines.

"And you are likely to get there in a hurry, too, if I call the wagon," replied the officer.

"Wagon, h——l," cried the farmer, "I'll go with you. Wait until I see Flood, I want someone to go on my bond."

"That is out of the question," said the officer.

"Let us go and get through with it," said Mark, smiling good humoredly. This had been his plan. He was willing to endure the humiliation of arrest if by that means he could save the day for Vance. When Mark had first outlined his purpose to get into an altercation with Haines, Vance would not listen to it. He felt that he could not be a party to a scheme that on the face of it seemed dishonorable.

"You know I am not desirous of appearing in a bad light now, just as I am beginning to feel some respect for myself," Mark had said, "but Haines and Flood will do their best to get the papers served today or tonight. You don't want that. I am willing to do this for you, and will do it only if I am obliged to. I won't hurt the man. So far as I am concerned, it will be a make-believe fight. If I do the thing half way gentlemanly, you can telephone the clerk to release me, but not until too late for Haines to get to Court, and you might go on Haines' bond, too. Naturally, you can take your own time to it, and we will remain locked up until you come. On the other hand, if Haines will talk sense and go home without doing anything for Flood, there will be no pretended 'scrap.'"

Reluctantly Vance consented. All this the officer understood fully when he made the arrest.

"This is hard luck," moaned the farmer. "I had counted on going home on the 8:30 train. My folks will be looking for me."

"You ain't likely to get any 8:30 train now," said the officer.

"Ain't there any way to settle this?" he asked, anxiously.

"There is a law against fighting in this State," said the officer.

"Haines, let us talk this over peaceably," said Mark. "You have done your duty and so have I, if you only knew it. If you will do the right thing, and the officer will let me telephone, I'll get us both out on bail right away."

"What do you mean by the right thing?"

"Go home and let Flood fight his own battles."

"I'd rather walk all the thirty miles than have my family know this."

"There is an accommodation train that leaves in an hour," said Mark.

"You and me can fix this thing in ten minutes if it wasn't for this charge of fighting," said Haines.

"Will you let me telephone?" asked Mark, with a significant wink that Haines failed to notice.

"I might take you to the depot. You can telephone from there before I lock you up."

"You could do that," said Mark.

"Ain't there some way to fix it so I won't be locked up?" pleaded Haines.

"Perhaps, wait until I telephone," said Mark.

While Vance had not anticipated this action, he remained near the telephone at the Casino, expecting to hear from Mark when he arrived at the police station. Presently the bell rang.

"Yes, Mr. Vance is here," said the manager.

"What is it?" asked Vance. He listened intently.

"He is ready to go home, you say? Certainly, what do you want me to say to the officer? If that is the case, call him. Is that Officer Smith? Haines will leave in half an hour? Why, certainly; I'll give you a better job if he don't. Stay with him until the train comes and have Mark come back with you. Manager Carmody is all right; I'll fix him. He is right here and hasn't missed a word I've said. Good."

Just then the doctor peered into the office; Vance returned the receiver.

"No injunction today, doctor."



## CHAPTER TWENTY.

A S

S Flood drew near, Norma suggested that Marion find Neil, who could remain within easy call if assistance should be needed. "You need not fear for me with all my friends here," Norma said.

"At last you have found it convenient to meet me," Flood gruffly remarked when he was seated. "You have taken your time to it. I am not used to being treated in such an indifferent manner."

"You have evidently been spoiled by someone. Humored, babyed, they sometimes call it. It could not have been your wife, you say you are unmarried; it was not I, I am sure. Who was the lady?"

"I hope jealousy was not the cause of your neglect," he said.

"Jealous? If you only knew how little jealousy troubles me, you would not mention it."

"What has come over you, Norma Lane? You have changed very much in the last few days. No one could have induced you to speak pleasantly to Neil Dare about the time of the Elks' Social. I recall that you snubbed him at Vance's office and that you were almost insulting at the social. All at once—"

"I did act contemptibly toward him," she interrupted, "but I think he will forgive, he has ever been generous toward me."

"Ah! that is the meaning of the interview I witnessed at Vance's office the other day," he exclaimed, angrily. "You seemed to be on most excellent terms all at once."

"There is little profit in quarreling all the time. But, let me ask you, how came you to see me at Mr. Vance's office?"

"It does not matter now — the question I'm asking is, why this sudden intimacy; why this renewed friendship with the man you said you despised?"

"Did I ever say I despised him?"

"Most assuredly. You reiterated it over and over."

"Girls often say things they don't mean. Mr. Wood——Mr. Flood, if I said such a thing, I will apologize to Mr. Dare." She saw him start as she said Mr. Wood——.

"I am asking you, Norma Lane, what this renewed intimacy with that fellow means?" ignoring the seeming mistake in the name.

"Why, it means — Oh, while I think of it, did not you and Mr. Dare have trouble here the day I met you last, and did he not punish you in some way?"

"Your friend Dare will regret his offense when I get possession of the road, as I will shortly."

"Then you have not abandoned that idea?"

"Why do you ask? That reminds me, what did you mean in your note about me leaving the city soon?"

"I had an idea you would. Let me ask you, did you see the lady who was with me that day?"

"I noticed a lady rather heavily veiled for the season, with you, and saw you go to Vance's office."

"She had not been down town with me before. She is visiting me, and I told her about you."

"Did you?" he exclaimed, and the cloud on his brow cleared.

"I hope it was not altogether bad?"

"I told her how gallantly you came to my rescue, when a young man I once knew had insulted me, here in the park," and out of the corner of her eye she watched his expression.

Brazen as he may have been with men or women of a kind, he flushed noticeably as she mentioned his gallantry.

"Thank you," he said quietly.

"She asked me how long I had known you. And when I told her she said a young girl could not be too careful — men who traveled much were oftimes married while pretending to be single."

Norma observed his growing uneasiness, and his efforts to change the subject. "There she goes now with Mr. Drake, the attorney," she continued. "Don't stare at them, please; they will think we are talking about them." The face of the lady was hidden by the shoulders of her escort, but her walk, her every movement, reminded him of his wife. "It could not be possible that she had carried her threat into execution," he thought, and yet she might.

"Has that fellow Dare been insinuating that I am married?"

"He has not; he never stoops to insinuations," she replied, sweetly. "Why do you ask?"

"Never stoops to insinuations, hey? What a cherub he is all at once. You hinted rather plainly in your last note that such a thing might be, and now you mention the subject again. I wish to ask you what you mean by it?"

"Such things have occurred," she answered.

"Norma, I mean to leave this city soon, and you must go with me. I cannot live without you. I cannot tell you how dear you are to me, how you are ever in my mind. In every waking hour you are with me. In the midst of important business your image rises before and clings to me like undying, fadeless perfume."

"How prettily you say that," she exclaimed, lightly.

"And how abominably you refer to it, as if I had recited a poem."

"Why, Mr. Flood, was that original? I imagined it was a quotation."

An angry flush overspread the face that had been white since he had caught a glimpse of the veiled lady. His black eyes expressed as much fear as anger. This was not meek, submissive Norma Lane, whose modest glances had thrilled him. Cold, calculating, and selfish as was his nature, this radiant girl enthralled him. All at once he remembered that he was to call Haines at the hotel. He feared to leave her, and yet he was most anxious to know what had been done by Haines and his attorney.

"I wish you would remain here, Norma" — he did not fail to note the flush and frown that meant rebuke — "Miss Lane, I should have said. I must telephone to the hotel at once, and will return immediately."

When Flood had closed the door of the booth, Neil and Marion hurried to Norma's side to learn what had transpired.

"He is decidedly nervous and uneasy, as if he feared something. He told me, Neil, that he could not live without me," and Norma's eyes were telling a story Neil loved to read.

"That means slow music for Flood," he replied. "He shall not have you — never, never, never."

"Three nevers, what a long, long time that must be," answered Norma.

Attorney Drake and Mrs. Woodward were strolling about the grounds, the ostensible purpose of which was to keep out of Flood's sight, but each seemed greatly interested in the subject of conversation, so the walk was indefinitely prolonged. Noticing the absence of Flood, they joined the group.

"What has he said?" asked Mrs. Woodward.

"I couldn't begin to tell you all," Norma replied. Well she knew that all the interest the fair young woman who was now her friend and guest had in the man she called husband was in securing an honorable separation. She was not one

who believed that a mistake made at the altar must be borne through life. She was one who dissented from the idea that marriages were made in heaven, or if they were, heaven frequently made glaring mistakes.

"There he comes now," said Neil, as he saw Flood hastening toward them. Even at a distance they saw that he was greatly worried.

"You will signal me, Norma, when you want me," said Mrs. Woodward.

"As the time is not yet, let us get away, but remain near enough to worry him," was the advice Drake gave.

Neil and Marion made it a point to meet him face to face. He lifted his hat and bowed to Marion, but there was no sneer this time for Neil.

"I don't understand it," he said, as he resumed his place at the table with Norma. "I cannot imagine what has happened to Haines. They have not seen him at the hotel, and I could not get anyone at the Court House. My attorney was right, doubtless, when he urged me to act this forenoon, but I wished to see you first."

Drake and Mrs. Woodward were passing near, and Flood's eyes followed them.

"Who is that woman?" he asked abruptly.

"She says she has seen you somewhere," Norma replied, evasively.

"She imagines so, perhaps, but you did not tell me her name. Who is she?"

Norma was nonplussed for the moment. She did not want him to know just then that his wife was there watching him. She meant to punish him for his outrageous conduct. He, bound to this woman who once had trusted him, had almost ruined her life by his pretense of honorable marriage. She did not know what he might say or do, but she was sure the time — the dramatic moment — the psychological moment —

had not arrived. She was waiting for a situation that would overwhelm him. The exact moment had not yet come when she would turn upon him: "Kennedy Woodward, alias Cyrus Flood, you are a scoundrel. Tell me, do you know this lady?"

She wanted to see him grow white with fear. She wanted to see him cower before Neil Dare. She wanted a situation as the stage people put it. It was not altogether for herself, for the wrong he was trying to do her, nor the wrong to his unoffending and faithful wife, but Neil's wrongs must be righted, and in the presence of those who witnessed his humiliation, the day Flood made his first appearance in Vance's office.

Before Norma could frame her reply to the question: "Who is she?" a messenger from the office called to him, saying that he was wanted at the telephone. "At last," he exclaimed with a sigh of relief, and apologizing for the abrupt departure, rushed away to answer the call.

While he was absent, Norma, observing Mrs. Woodward and her escort near the entrance of the theater, went swiftly to them. Mr. Drake told her that Flood's last hope, Haines, had gone home, and Vance was in no further danger from court proceedings.

"Then the curtain on this drama falls. Keep close to me until I signal," Norma said. The appearance Flood presented when he returned would have brought tears to her eyes had it been one she cared for.

"Great God!" he exclaimed, his face drawn and pinched and white, "how things have gone with me today. Everything is against me." He saw her careless smile and cried out against it: "Don't laugh; have you no pity, Norma Lane? Have you turned against me, as all the world has turned?"

Even a good woman plays the part of tigress at times. Not the tearing, mangling tigress, but the purring creature, that plays with its victim until the moment comes to end it all. 'Tis a limp and lifeless thing the tigress looks upon when her lust for blood makes her fierce eyes green; and so a woman sometimes leaves her victim with mangled heart and limp, dead soul.

"You look awfully glum," she said. "What has happened?"-

"Haines, the man I have relied upon, the man I have paid to stay by me until the last, has turned, like the coward he is, and gone home."

"Is this the end of your scheming?" she asked, quietly.

"Scheming?" He was glaring at her like an animal at bay. "Scheming," he repeated. "It has been business all the time, legitimate business until I saw you. Then I lost my head. You may not believe me when I say my heart, but I did. For you, Norma Lane, I have sacrificed all; for you, Norma Lane, I'll lose and laugh at the losing—if—if you will love me."

"If I will love you," she replied; "wait, let me see——" she saw them stop; the signal he did not understand was given and a woman so closely veiled he could not know her came swiftly toward them.

"If I will love you," she said once more, "first let me ask you one question: Are you free to love me? Dare you tell me in the presence of this woman that you are free to love?"

"In the presence of this woman—" he repeated her words as in a dream.

"In the presence of this woman," she answered with solemn emphasis.

Drake and the veiled woman stood before him. Even before she bared the hidden face he knew her. His breath came in quick, short gasps. "You!" he cried, "you, Jessie Carrollton—"

"Jessie Carrollton, once," she answered sternly, "and Jessie Carrollton it must be again. It was a stainless name I brought to you, Kennedy Woodward. She whom you tried to

drag down to your level is now my friend. Those whom you have tried to destroy or swindle have been my friends when you deserted me. I can call you husband, but I blush to do it. I saw you grow pale when I went by under the protection of a man. I did not fear you, Cyrus Flood, as you are pleased to call yourself, for I was safe.. A man—a man made in the image of his Maker—stands between me and all the harm you can offer. I come to bring defeat to you. I came because he asked me," and she glanced with unshamed admiration into the face of John Adams Drake." "I came to save a woman, a sister, from the snares of the despoiler, and in the presence of this man I am safe, even from you, Kennedy Woodward."

"Norma!" He was strangely white — white as if death had touched him — "I confess; she was beneath me, but to save her from shame I made her mine. I gave her my name, and this is my reward. This stranger takes my place. I turn to you for honest love——"

"You cur, you coward, you craven wretch, you letcherous beast—in the presence of all my friends I will stand by the woman you swore to protect and love, the woman you have robbed and tried to cast aside. That may do in the great city where sin sneers at goodness, where vice laughs virtue to scorn, but here among men, you are powerless, Cyrus Flood—powerless. In the eyes of the law she is yours, but in the heart of justice she is ours."

"Yours, you mean, yours by right of conquest."

"Drake sprang toward him, but Neil interfered. Flood threw up his hands helplessly.

"Wait," Neil said calmly, "I will deal with him. He is a coward, and one can only feel contempt for himself when he strikes a cur like this one. With him, as with the mongrel beast, one can only kick him aside, and blush for having kicked the thing."

"Norma, do you listen to these, or will you hear me? The woman who calls me husband is shamelessly another's. He whom you despised now licks your hand, and whines like a beaten cur for favor. Before the world I claim you, Norma, as my own."

Neil's hands were clenched, his eyes were blazing. Vance and the doctor stood beside them now.

"Wait a moment, Neil," said Norma. "There stands your wife, Mr. Flood, an unloved woman who deserves the best that man can offer. You have asked me within the hour to marry you. In the presence of these, my friends, I denied the truest heart that ever beat for a woman. I did it for you, Cyrus Flood, and with shame unspeakable, I confess. But in the depths of my shame he came to me. He lifted me and put his arms about me and sheltered me as women pray for shelter. I have waited for this hour, Cyrus Flood, to pay you for your perfidy. I have waited for this hour to tell you that there is but one place in my heart for a man—a man—Cyrus Flood, not such as you."

They had gathered about him, all these whom he had wronged, but not a hand was lifted against him. Pale and trembling he stood before them. She who bore his name had turned her back upon him. Norma went to Neil, her eyes lifted to his as if in prayer for forgiveness.

In the great, warm heart of Vance there was pity. Flood had been his enemy in business only, but with Neil it was different. He had tried to rob him of the love that was life and hope, and he was waiting for a word to give him the right to punish.

It came so unexpected — they stood aghast a moment, and then Neil sprang upon him.

Flood knew the end had come. All his plans had come to naught. The girl he sought now scorned him. The wife had turned her back upon him.

Like a wolf at bay he turned upon them. "Take them, gentlemen, take them — each one 'my light o' love,' as the Scotch put it——"

He did not finish. Neil was the wild beast of the jungle now. The girl he loved cried out against the monster that stabbed her honor.

Drake, powerful in the strength of his young manhood, sprang toward the husband of the woman who meekly bore his insult. Neil was first. Flood heard his hiss: "You stain the earth she treads upon — your hour has come." His fingers closed about the throat of his enemy.

Vance saw the wild, protruding eye, he saw the look of abject fear, he heard the gurgle-gurgle of the strangling wretch, and then he swept down upon them. Like a whirlwind he caught them. He tore them apart. "Neil, stop!" he thundered. 'Remember the Book — 'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE.

Aunt when they returned to their home at Darby Center. While Vance, in the joy of his newfound happiness announced that the trunks might be unpacked again, found a strong advo-

cate in Aunt Louise. Why not stay a while longer? she thought, but Eleanor disapproved. "It would be indelicate; it would cause no little talk, and we must not stay here now," she said.

"It is just like getting up from the table the minute you've finished your meal, and making a streak for home," replied her Aunt.

"I know Mr. Vance would like us to stay longer. Jean is insisting, too, but dearly as I love this beautiful place, and much as I shall miss seeing the man I have won, the man I am so proud to love, I must go home."

"I'm willing, but he seemed to want you to stay and I felt like agreeing with him. I never had a niece step into a home like this."

"The home is beautiful, but that is the least of all—it is the man—the splendid gentleman whom I can call mine that I think of most," replied her niece.

"I 'spose I missed something in life, living as I have alone, but there were no Wilberton Vance's around Darby, and the few I might have cared to sit beside in church seemed to shy off, and so I'm getting a grain of comfort seeing my Eleanor, as I always call you to myself, lean on a man

as is a man. I saw him watch you that first night when Jean and you were talking. He didn't act silly at all like some widowers I've seen. His eyes seemed to be saying: 'How nice she is,' and I watchin' him as he watched you, folded my hands and whispered a prayer. The good Lord don't have to be yelled at, as some do, and I'm thinking with a deal of satisfaction that maybe He heard me." Whether lost in reverie, or whether unspoken thanks were being lifted to the One who "don't have to be yelled at," Eleanor did not know, but each sought rest that night with strange, new gladness abiding with them.

The visit was prolonged two days that Jean might accompany them. At first the young lady thought that she could not leave Harold to the uncertain mercies of an unfeeling world, now that all his faults had fled, now that all his jokes, feeble or otherwise, had become gems of humor. Eleanor was persistent and Jean consented. Naturally, Harold was consulted before the final conclusion was arrived at, and there was an emphatic protest.

"A fellow never knows what might happen. Why, there may be some fellow out there that will upset everything, and we are going along at such an easy gait now," he said.

"Eleanor can put a blind bridle on her, if you are afraid," said Aunt Louise.

"I'd rather see her wear the bridal robe — I'd feel surer of her," he replied.

"It is not so far that you cannot come and see her. You can surely spend a Sunday with us now and then," was Eleanor's reply.

"Now and then?" he cried. "How long is this visit to last?"

"We have a lot of work to do, and we cannot have you men bothering us as you would if I was home," Jean told him. "Then when you are very lonesome you may come for me." "My nephew to be," said Aunt Louise, sharply, "I know you are a busy man, but you will come, too. Of course, you will be Eleanor's guest, but there is a little farm two miles from town where the chickens roost low, and there will be one in the skillet whenever you come."

The event at the Casino that Saturday afternoon was fully narrated in the letters Eleanor and Jean received from Lake City. That the threatened proceedings in Court were no longer to be feared, was as pleasing to the young ladies at Darby Center as to the gentlemen in the city, and Jean read Harold's version of the Casino episode aloud, only here and there was a sentence quite too personal and interesting for even Eleanor to hear. Eleanor's letter required some editing for Aunt Louise's benefit, but each story was full of interest. The expurgated portions were considered by far the most interesting features of the letters to the one girl in the case. Harold's was less coherent, although more brilliant. The "my darling," and "that devil," were so closely interwoven that Jean could with difficulty keep Aunt Louise upon the track of the story.

One feature of the episode neither Vance nor Harold could explain, and that was, what became of Flood.

When the exciting scene at the Casino was over and Flood could speak, he thanked Vance in a few well-chosen words. I owe to you, perhaps, my life, or if that seems to serious or overdrawn, at least much physical discomfort. He who attacked me was easily the victor. Some day I may repay the debt I owe him with interest."

"Mr. Flood, you have tried to do me financial injury; you insulted in a manner most cowardly a young woman whose honor and reputation is dear to me; you offered insult to your wife as well, and I am free to say that I think it quite as false as your reference to Miss Lane. Even the humiliation of your defeat, and the unexpected appearance of your wife, was

no excuse for the gross insult. Had not Neil punished you, I would, or at least attempted it. If, as you have said," continued Vance, "I saved your life, and I think I did, I am glad I was permitted to do it. Glad for your sake and more glad for Neil Dare. I would never forgive myself if I stood by and witnessed the death of a fellow man even though the provocation was great. Let me say a word concerning the business that brought you here. You were not more to blame than other agents of unscrupulous syndicates or organizations, and therefore, I bear you no personal malice. There was a time, had you pressed matters, when you could have done the project I have at heart great injury, but that time has gone by."

"I am of that opinion also, particularly now that Mr. Standhope, of the Company I pretended to represent, is on the ground," replied Flood.

"That reminds me; Mr. Standhope is of the opinion that his Company could cause you some trouble in Court; at least unpleasant notoriety. Now, if I may ask, do you, or your Company, desire to make further efforts to secure the road? If you think the question is one your sense of obligation to your employers should prevent you answering, do not think the events of the last hour or two will militate against you, or that an answer is necessary."

"So far as I am concerned I am ready to quit. I am free to say that I should like to see your employee punished for his assault upon me. I imagine, however, that I can hope for little help from the Courts. Public sentiment would be strong against me, and public sentiment rules Courts sometimes. You have shown a disposition to be more generous towards me than my mission here warrants, and therefore, ask this favor of you: that I be permitted to remain here unmolested and without further scandal until I can communicate by mail with the Company that has employed me. I

could telegraph, but that would be unsatisfactory. I wish to explain the situation fully. The presence of Mr. Standhope offers a legitimate excuse for my failure, and naturally, I wish to appear in as favorable a light as possible."

The young attorney, John Adams Drake, had heard all that was said, but bore no part in the conversation. The ladies had turned away when Neil sprang upon Flood, as here-tofore narrated. That is, Mrs. Woodward and Marion, trembling and pale, saw but little that occurred. Norma, however, looked on unmoved until she saw that Neil might kill the man he hated, then she cried out: "Neil, Neil, for my sake——"but Vance had intervened.

The doctor hastened to Marion and the sobbing wife. Deserted and insulted as she had been, she remembered that the man called Flood was her husband. It was not love that prompted the tears—it was pity—pity for the man without a friend to plead for him. What her heart was saying, as she lifted appealing eyes to Drake and hurried from the scene, she could not tell. She knew, however, that life would be intolerable now, should she be compelled to return to New York.

A frightened backward glance had shown the stalwart figure of Wilberton Vance in the midst of the turmoil. She saw Neil turn away when Vance had said: "Vengeance is mine."

She was glad that Drake did not come to her now that the trouble had passed. "Let us go somewhere and sit awhile — I — I am tired, I think," she said. She sat and watched them — there were just the three men, Vance, Drake and Flood, and they were talking.

"What will become of me?" she was thinking. She did not know that the young attorney had this same question in his mind. She did not know that he had planned or mapped out her future if her husband was not obdurate. He had learned to know her well enough in the short time they had been together to realize that she would go with her unworthy husband if he demanded it. He knew, however, that it was Norma's wish that she remain in Lake City. In fancy he saw her installed in Vance's office when Marion should go back to school.

As Flood was about to leave the grounds, Drake said: "This is not the time to say what I would like to say to you, Mr. Flood, but let me assure you that if you will grant me an interview at your hotel tonight, or elsewhere if you prefer, it will be upon a business proposition that we can discuss calmly."

"Come to the hotel," replied Flood quietly, but coldly.

When Drake arrived Flood was waiting in the office of the hotel. His letter to the Syndicate had been written, his explanations made, his suggestions plainly stated, and now he was ready to meet the lawyer.

"Do you prefer the privacy of my room, or will this do?" he asked.

"This will do," was the reply. "Mr. Flood, what I mean to ask you will be more easily understood if I tell you how I came to meet your wife. I beg that you will listen patiently, even though you be tempted to interrupt, or feel a sense of indignation. When I have finished I will answer every question you may ask save one."

"Naturally I would ask that question now, if I understood, but proceed," replied Flood.

"When things looked ominous for Vance, or the completion of the road without Court proceedings, some of Vance's friends, without his knowledge, sought to locate the company you were connected with, for some of us, were not ready to accept the Great Northern Electric Company story when we learned your purpose. That on the face of it was evident, but when I met Mr. Standhope on the train, on my way to

New York, and in a casual conversation learned his business and the establishment he was connected with, I asked what he knew of one Cyrus Flood, a representative of his house.

"Naturally, he knew nothing about you. He did not believe you were sent to Lake City by his Company. When we reached New York he called upon me, with the information that you were not an agent of the Great Northern, and that he would go at once to see Vance. I was not specially interested in looking up the Company that had sent you to Lake City. On account of your intimacy with Norma Lane, I was particularly interested in meeting your wife, and in securing proofs that she was your wife. Could I have foreseen the conclusion of this affair as it came about today I would not have induced her to leave New York. She consented, however, when I told her that it was to save the honor of a young woman very dear to many gentlemen in Lake City. I need not tell you what I mean — I think you understand."

Flood assented, and Drake was about to proceed when Flood asked: "How did you come to know her address, or learn that I had a wife?"

"So far as I know it was in a perfectly legitimate manner."

"May I ask you how?"

"By correspondence," answered Drake so promptly and with such candor that Flood was about to let the subject pass, but recalling that no one in Lake City could know the address except himself, unless she had written to someone, he was curious to know who.

"Of course, she knew I was here; there is nothing mysterious in that, but naturally I would like to know the person." Flood's manner was respectful, and on the face of it seemed a bit of natural curiosity, but back of the apparently indifferent request for information, there was more than mere

curiosity. There was a suspicion that the lawyer had won the affections of the wife from whom he sought freedom. He knew he had lied in a most cowardly manner about her and about the man who was quietly telling the story of his connection with the case. He knew that his wife would tell the attorney all that he had written - doubtless, she had already told him, and there was that sentiment — if sentiment it can be called — that has existed since the cave-man fought fierce battles for his own — that even the brute creation possess in marked degree - resentment against the intrusion of the stranger. Yesterday he would have hailed such intrusion as a most happy circumstance, but now the girl had passed beyond his reach. Now he was alone. His wounded vanity was crying for murmured sympathy from woman, and this man was likely to steal from him the one woman who had borne without reproach, indifference and neglect.

"To whom did she write, may I ask?"

"To you."

"How did you get any of my letters?" He tried ot put the question calmly, but there was an angry glitter in his eyes.

"I told you when I began, that I would answer every question you might ask save one — that is the question I cannot answer."

"That is the one I want answered." The peculiar graywhite pallor that Drake had observed upon the face of this man when Neil's fingers were closing about his throat had returned. His lips were drawn; there was madness in the staring eyes.

"I made myself clear, I hope ,when I said I could not answer — now I say I will not answer."

"By God, sir, I think I uttered more truth than I believed this afternoon—"

"Stop. This afternoon Wilberton Vance saved your life. Neil Dare would have strangled you. Your end was nearer than you thought. I want no scene here, but I want you to retract that slur upon my honor — that insult to your wife." Drake waited a moment. "You have heard me," he added, quietly.

Flood was silent. He did not attempt to rise. He sat staring at his foe, as he considered him, staring, and all the while breathing heavily as at the end of a swift race.

"If you do not wish to be dragged into that vacant room, you will go there quietly with me. There is no one to interfere. For such innuendos there is no law—there is simply the punishment one brute gives to another. I will beat you into insensibility. I will not attempt to kill you as Neil did, but I will punish you—punish you terribly. I know I can do it; you know it, too. I am loath to do it, I will wait a moment, but when I thrust you into that room it will be too late."

"If you were guilty, and your words a mere bluff, I could read it in your face and call the bluff. I am mistaken. I retract the imputation against my wife — I apologize. If you have more to tell me, proceed," and Flood looked steadily at the floor.

"There is little more to tell," replied Drake. "I asked your wife when I found her for proof of your marriage. She gave it to me. I asked her to come with me to Lake City to save the honor of a young woman. She came, as you know. She told her story to Norma Lane. They became friends. Your wife has a home where she is most welcome. She is fitting herself to make a living here, if you will not care for her. I have no interest in your affairs or her's, except that which any gentleman might lay claim to. She came at my request. The purpose of her coming has been accomplished. I will not leave her to drift back to New York as best she can. Wilberton Vance will offer her a position in his office.

It is only fair to you to tell you this and ask what you propose to do."

"I might take her back to New York if she desires to go, but that hangs upon the action of the syndicate. If I am relieved, I cannot do for her until I secure a new situation. If she prefers to remain here I shall offer no protest."

"Do you desire an interview with her?"

"I am not seeking an interview. I did not ask her to come. I should not be required to go to her now. If she wishes to call upon me, tomorrow I will see her. If she does not come, I will know that she prefers new friends," said Flood significantly, but coldly.

"These new friends will give her protection and employment."

"And a divorce?"

"We will not discuss embarrassing questions. I will say, however, that among her new friends are some who claim to be gentlemen; how familiar you may be with that class I am not able to say, but gentlemen never suggest ideas or acts that belong to conscience."

"Mr. Drake, I anticipate returning to New York within a day or two at most. I recognize I have failed here, and the least of these failures is the railway scheme — the effort to crush Vance. The other you know. After seeing Norma Lane my wife is as one who is in the grave. If Mrs. Kennedy Woodward cares to see me again, I shall treat her kindly. If she wishes to go back to New York, you, who brought her here, will provide her transportation, but if left to me I would prefer that she remain. A moment ago I was angry, jealous, perhaps, but I am myself again. To have her with me in New York, is to bring back memories of Lake City — memories that I hope will die. To see her there is to see you, Mr. Drake, and I earnestly desire that I shall have seen you for the last time when I say — good night."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO.

E

VERY member of the lodge at Lake City was notified that there would be an initiation on a certain meeting night. The notification did not state who the candidate would be, but those regular in attendance were well aware that the name signed

to the application was that of Jno. P. Harley.

When Flood had quietly left the city—as quietly and mysteriously as he came—Dr. Harley intimated to Wilberton Vance that he would like to be a member of the Order he had learned to love and respect for what it meant, and what it did.

"Long ago," said he, "I would have made application, but you know how it was. There was not much left when bills were paid. It is different now, and if the boys want me, I'd like to be with them. I won't be in the way much, and I won't do all the talking. Shakespeare speaks of those whose shadows have grown long in life's afternoon as men who 'babble o' green fields,' but I am not of these, I hope, and so if Neil or Harold or some of you care to take my name, the money is waiting."

"I do not propose," replied Vance, "that Neil or Harold will have that satisfaction. That pleasure will be mine. Here is the blank, answer these questions, and sign your name. I'll see to the rest, that is, if the boys don't black-ball you. Of course, if they do, it won't cost you anything."

"It won't, hey? You have no idea how much it would cost me. It would cost me so much that I'd go back to Eden

— back to the little village and the country folk — where they love me, foolishly perhaps, but there I'm old Doc John, and there I'd feel welcome."

"One never knows just what will happen, but I suggest that you don't make arrangements as yet to move back to the village," and Vance turned his back to his old friend that he might not see the smile which would have told how remote the possibility was that the boys would fail to welcome him.

When the secretary read the names of the committee of investigation, there was a ripple of applause and the chairman arose and said: "The committee is ready to report, and while informal, we will sign the application and investigate afterward." The committee consisted of Jno. Adams Drake, Neil Allen Dare, and Harold Henderson Brady.

Never had such an investigation been conducted in the history of Lake City Lodge. It was held after the ballot was taken, and as everyone anticipated there were no black balls cast. The committee acted on Brady's suggestion that they have a bit of preliminary fun with the doctor, even if it was irregular. Naturally, the doctor knew nothing about the ballot, or when it occurred, and when he got notice one day that a committee would call upon him after office hours that evening he awaited their coming with a feeling of nervousness that he hoped they would not discover.

The demeanor of the committee could not have been more solemn had they been approaching the death bed of the candidate. The doctor bade them welcome in his usual cheery manner, or rather attempted to do so, but the funerial aspect of these men — these friends of his — chilled him though the August night was sultry. With a cheeriness altogether assumed he produced a box of cigars, the brand proclaiming their excellence.

"Have a cigar with me, boys, we can smoke and talk, too."

He passed the box to Drake, whose fondness for the weed was well known. He took a cigar, and after examining it carefully, replaced it in the box and silently passed it on to Neil. Neil gravely imitated Drake's proceedure and handed the box to Harold. The doctor was watching Harold closely, hoping that he might discover a twinkle in the eyes of this light-hearted friend that would proclaim it all a joke. Harold closed the lid and silently passed the box back to the candidate.

The doctor knew his cigars were beyond reproach, and he knew as well that each of these men sitting so silently and solemnly were inveterate smokers.

"What is the matter, gentlemen? Those cigars are all right."

"Perhaps," said Drake.

"Perhaps," echoed Neil.

"Possibly," added Harold, with unusual sternness.

The doctor had never attempted to join a secret society before, and he began to wonder what all this meant. He had no idea it was such a serious proposition. His eyes sought each face in turn, but there was no encouragement, no sign of friendliness even.

"If you have any bad news, gentlemen, don't hesitate to speak. I told Vance I'd like to be an Elk, but if you don't want me, it's all right, boys. You've been my friends, and, and, I won't hold it against you." They had never seen such a look of sadness on the benevolent and kindly face, or heard such a note of pathos in his voice.

"Things look a little dark for you, doctor," said Drake, after a long pause.

"May I ask why?" There was no reply.

"You have known me personally or by reputation, gentlemen, and there is nothing in my past that I shall seek to hide from you." "Do you know you have just committed a serious offense, Doctor Harley?"

"What have I done, Mr. Drake?"

"You have attempted to bribe us."

"Bribe you?" there was resentment in his tone.

"It is a serious offense," solemnly announced Harold.

"Very serious," said Neil.

"Tremendously serious," added Drake.

"Boys, are you trying to play horse with the old man?" asked the doctor.

"Far from it," replied Drake - "far from it."

"In the first place you are accused of wanting the Ramure, doctor. Think of it, the Ramure. Then on top of that you attempt to bribe the committee — innocently, doubtless — because you are by nature generous — but you have no idea what those cigars mean to this committee."

"Precious little idea," Harold added in a sort of chant. Neil said nothing — simply moaned.

"Do you mean, gentlemen, that because I offered you the courtesy common among gentlemen, a cigar—a social, friendly smoke, and each man of you has accepted cigars from me—that I am offering you a bribe? I do not know what your rules are, but that looks like a bit of damned foolishness to me." There was no pathetic note in his voice now. The danger signal was showing; the old wound was growing purple. If the doctor was disturbed by the peculiar actions of the committee, the boys were suffering. They wanted to yell. Neil was able at all times to mask his emotions, but Harold had not that power, and he was wondering at his success in keeping his face immobile and solemn.

"Doctor, have you pronounced views upon the tariff?" asked Neil, breaking the silence. "In our Order you are privileged to hold your political views, but you must be careful how and where you express yourself upon the tariff."

"My boy, if you knew how little I care about the condemned tariff one way or the other, you would not ask me the question," replied the doctor, earnestly.

"In the line of our investigation, I wish to ask you, doctor," and Harold retained both his voice and his gravity, "if you have ever given much thought, or have ever written anything on the subject of foreordination?"

"I should hope not," snapped the doctor.

"A great mistake you made, old friend."

"What in thunder has my views on the tariff or foreordination got to do with my fitness as a member of your Order?"

Before Harold could frame an appropriate reply, Drake hurriedly asked: "May I ask, doctor, if you were ever a victim of a secret marriage?"

"Boys, I'm trying hard to break myself of swearing," answered the doctor earnestly, "but if I have to answer a lot of idiotic questions like that, you'll open up a bundle of vivid English — in a few minutes — that I had hoped would ever remain unopened."

"You grieve us grievously, doctor," and Harold's hands were folded piously; "you speak with levity, with profaneness, I may add, as well as levity. As your friends in the outside world, that is permissible, but as a committee impressed with the solemnity of its mission, it is different. It is barely possible that you have never encountered a committee such as this."

"I have no recollection of having been honored in such a manner before, and if I retain my respect and admiration for a Society of which I had hoped to be a part, I devoutly pray this may be the last." The doctor arose and walked up and down the office, uttering no further comment. Each member of the committee sat with impassive face looking silently at the floor. Presently they arose simultaneously as if at the rap of an invisible gavel.

"He is not humble," said Drake.

"He is not meek," responded Neil.

"He is not contrite," added Harold.

The doctor paused in his walk. Paused by the door. It was his unspoken decision that the interview was over. The scar of Gettysburg was livid. In his face they saw more pity than anger. In their hearts they yearned to take him by the hand and say: "This is only a joke of ours, old friend. The Lodge, the Order, has nothing to do with us. You are elected and we wait to make you one of us," but their plans were to leave him to wonder what the strange interview meant.

"We must retain this evidence of his attempt at bribery," and Harold secured the box of cigars, and with a solemn "good night," they filed out of the office.

When their footsteps had died away the old man sat for a time in deep study. "Was this simply a joke?" he asked himself. Then he remembered that Drake had said you're accused of wanting the "Ramure." He turned to the dictionary on the shelf, but did not find the word.

It was no medical term, he knew. Then recalling that in his room was an old French dictionary, he closed the office and directed his steps toward the furnished rooms he called home. He found the book, and the word. "Horns or Antlers," he read. "Those dag-burned boys," he said, "how did they manage to keep a straight face?"

The lines that came within the hour faded as he sat laughing softly at the trick they had played upon him. Then from a locked drawer he took a photograph. He unwrapped the folds of tissue paper, and looking at it tenderly, his lips moved as if in silent prayer. What he said the Spirit Immortal might have caught—it was not meant for human ears. It was a picture of a girl some fourteen years of age. The face was thin and pathetic. He had begged that she sit for the picture as soon as she was able to go out of the house. He

had fought death for this little girl and triumphed. She was now rosy and joyous and full of life. "Good night, little one," he said, and sank to rest, a smile lingering upon his lips.

It was the next day that Vance met him. "The committee visited you last night, I understand," said he.

"What do they say about it?"

"I think every member of the lodge is laughing about it today."

"Did you smoke any of my cigars that Harold carried away?" asked the doctor.

"No, we will smoke them after the initiation."

"The initiation?"

"Of course. The boys put up this joke on you after everything was settled."

"And to think they never cracked a smile. It's one on me, Vance, and now to show that I appreciate a joke, even if I am the victim, I'm going to fool the boys. They must not know anything about it. I'll go out to Eden and get Abe Thomas to buy me three dozen young chickens, the biggest and best he can find. Then I want you or Norma to invite Abe and his wife to stay all night in town, for Abe's wife must cook the chickens. No chef at \$10,000 a year can equal Malinda Thomas when it comes to chicken with gravy and little white biscuit that melt in your mouth. You don't have to eat them, they seem to evaporate and sanctify you. If the saints in the realms eternal ever eat, they'll smack their lips when Malinda Thomas gets there."

"Stop, doctor, I lunched only an hour ago, but you make me hungry. It is settled where Abe and his wife will stay when they come to town. Let me bear part of the expense—"

"Expense nothing — this will be my revenge," said the doctor as he strode away.

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

The initiation was over, and when it came to the "Good of the Order," the doctor was called upon for remarks.

"After what I heard tonight," he said, "I should be ready to forgive my enemies, but I am not sure I have arrived at that stage of Brotherly Love that I can. Three of these new brothers of mine played a trick on me the other night and I won't feel quite satisfied until I have had my turn at it."

Vance had managed, by keeping the doors locked, even against the protest of some who wanted to get into the banquet room or the kitchen upon one pretext or another, to make the richly laden tables a complete surprise.

Malinda Thomas had never surpassed her work on this occasion. Her heart was in the work. Her old friend, the doctor, had asked this favor of her, and he did not ask in vain.

"I have planned a revenge," continued the doctor, "and when that has been completed——"

"The hour of your revenge is at hand," interrupted Wilberton Vance, and the banquet room was open and ablaze with light and the odors from the kitchen came like unseen blessings and settled about them.

"The brothers will be seated at once and remain silent until the word is given," said Vance. "I know the flesh is weak, and temptation is great," he continued, "but you will not touch a toothsome morsel until we hear from the doctor."

The doctor was embarrassed and paused for words, as he had anticipated that Vance would say what was necessary.

The applause, hearty and long continued, was not calculated to restore his equanimity, but when quiet came he said: "My brothers, this is my revenge. I have called upon friends of mine in the country to help make it complete. A good woman I have known for years, whose guest I have been more times than I would like to tell — but when you have finished you will guess why — and this woman came to give you a

sample of the blessings the Good Lord sends country folks. But before we eat, her husband, my friend, who worships the most Exalted of all Rulers, and who looks to Him as the children of men should look to a father, will ask a blessing. Abraham Thomas, offer thanks."

The voice of the farmer trembled as in the presence of these strangers he offered his simple words of thanksgiving for all the good things of life, and when he said "Amen," there was a reverent response from the brotherhood.

Harold Brady was made chairman of the social. He congratulated the lodge on its good fortune to be able to enjoy a fine old-fashioned country dinner. He praised the cooking and left blushes on the cheeks of the good Mrs. Thomas.

"I hope to enjoy another such dinner some day-"

"He is counting on going to Thomas' on his wedding tour," broke in the doctor.

As this event was near at hand, the toastmaster was, for once, an embarrassed individual. The doctor was quick to note the effect of his interruption, and when the laughter died away assumed a Monte Cristo pose and cried "One."

Many happy hits were made that evening, but to relate them would simply rob the brothers of a pleasing memory. One incident, however, was of such a nature that the story of that social would be incomplete with out it. There had been repeated calls for Doctor Harley, and finally he arose to respond.

"Mr. Toastmaster," cried Wilberton Vance, "before the doctor begins his remarks I have a note here—a note that will never go to protest—which I will read. It is directed to me alone, but I will share with you," and Vance read:

"LAKE CITY, Aug. 15, 19-..

"DEAR MR. VANCE: — I have heard that Doctor Harley will be an Elk tonight. As my papa was your first president,

or ruler, I feel that I am not too bold, in asking that his daughter might offer a little token of her friendship to the physician who worked as never physician worked before, that I might live. He has never let me pay him. Will you present him in my name this Emblem, and I beg that each one of you who have been so kind to me—no noble in your devotion to my sister and myself—will join with me in wishing the newest Elk in Lake City many years of life not only to wear the badge, but to enjoy your loyal friendship.

"Your well wisher,
"Marion Lane."

There had been applause before that evening, but none like this. While Vance fastened the badge upon the lapel of the old man's coat there were cheers, and then silence — deep silence.

"They wait for you to speak," said Vance.

"My brothers" — and his voice rang out clear and distinct, but not another word could he utter. Vance saw his appealing glance, saw his lips tremble and nodded to Harold. The young man caught his meaning, and rapping, sharply cried:

"My Brothers, it is Eleven o'clock."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE.

HE work on the Lake City and Southeastern Trolley Line was pushed to the utmost as soon as it was known that no further attempts would be made to interfere with the project. What report Flood made Vance never knew, but the fact that

the Great Northern was interested and Standhope was making every hour count by his personal supervision, all of which known to the Syndicate, led that body of capitalists to make no further effort to get possession of the line. All the funds needed and much more was within easy reach. To the stockholders who had listened to Flood, and who for a time were dissatisfied, had repeated opportunities to dispose of their stock at a figure more than ordinarily tempting.

Two farmers, somewhat pressed for money, sold their holdings, and this stock was secured by Dr. Harley.

When the cars for the road came, the doctor insisted that Vance take every advantage a cash payment might offer. While the credit of the road was such that all the time needed could be easily secured, yet there was always a saving when a cheque awaited every delivery.

"There are fifty thousand dollars in the bank that I can easily spare, and it is yours to use, Vance. I want such security as you may suggest, but will not accept interest," said the doctor.

"While it is not necessary, and while the road can borrow all the money needed, I will accept your offer. The security your attorney, not yourself, will arrange with Judge Tompkins. You know the Judge has looked after my affairs for years, and you know, too, that if you had no one to represent you he would take no advantage that honor did not permit."

"You speak of my attorney, Vance, what use do you imagine I have for an attorney?"

"You have a hundred thousand dollars to care for, and while you have always been poor, you are not in that condition now. Not as fortunes go in this city. Now, let me say something plain to you; you are an able man in most things, but you have about as much knowledge of the value of a dollar as a child. You need not attempt to look indignant—it is true, and it is a friend who tells another the truth sometimes, even though that truth hurts. I will accept that \$50,000 on the condition I have outlined. If you have no attorney, get Drake, he is capable and is honest, as honest as Judge Tompkins, and I can pay him no higher compliment."

"All right, Vance, if you think best, but I had intended that you should give me your note for the amount, and if I died before it was paid, I'd arrange to pay it to Marion. She will get the bulk of what I leave. It would sort of tickle her grandfather if he could know it."

"You God blessed old idiot, I told you, you needed an attorney," and Vance hurried away.

It was shortly after this that Mrs. Woodward was installed in the Railway office. There was much that she could do, as she quickly became familiar with the typewriter, although she was a mere novice as yet in stenography. All her spare time was devoted to mastering the cabalistic signs, and her aptitude gave early promise of success. It was to Norma she had expressed a hope that Mr. Vance would give her opportunity—give her a chance when she should fit herself for office work.

Flood had not sent for her and she had no desire to go to him, although she would have done so had he requested. She remembered that Drake had promised a thousand dollars if Flood should fail. When she reached Lake City, and learned to know Norma Lane, and understood the motive that prompted Drake to make the offer, she knew she could accept no money from him or from Mr. Vance that she did not earn. She realized that these men would gladly have paid any sum within their means to preserve the honor of Norma Lane. Not that she was one to become abandonee, but she might have been the victim of a false marriage, or marry a man who had a wife and thus bring sorrow and disgrace.

She realized that when Drake met her in New York, he felt that Norma might not listen to a warning even from him. Therefore, her presence was wanted in Lake City, and he, the gentleman she felt him to be, would do all he had promised, or all that honor prompted him to do.

When her husband had flung the stinging insult that day at the Casino, she knew that the pale remnant of her love for him was dead. When Drake was about to hurl himself upon this most cowardly of husbands to punish him for the insult, she knew a new sentiment had come into her life. It was not love — she dared not love him — but it was that sort of admiration that would kindle into love's flame should his heart throb answer hers.

Then she knew that if he offered her the money he had promised, the money Flood would never offer, it would wound her deeply. Perhaps this thought came to Drake, but he had promised. Without question she came when he asked her. She was a stranger here; a guest of the girl she helped save, but this could not last.

His position was most delicate. In the depths of her soulful eyes he saw that she trusted him fully, but he seldom

met her. She was yet the wife of this man who ran away, and he was powerless to offer her protection.

Until she met her husband, there was nothing to do; there was nothing she could do but wait until the fitting moment planned by others. It was the next day after the Casino episode that Jessie Woodward — Jessie, as she insisted Norma should call her — not Mrs. Woodward — said to Norma, "I have learned to love this place and the great city will seem so cold, so desolate and so lonely with all its millions when I go back."

"But you are not going back — you must not dream of it, Jessie, dear, for I have planned so much for you."

"Norma, you have been so good to me — so sweet — more than a sister could be, but because I've learned to love you, I will not be a burden to you, a hanger on. I could not do that even though I grow sick at heart at thought of leaving you."

"Please don't talk of leaving me now, and never again must you say a word about being 'a hanger on.' When I recall what you and Mr. Drake did for me, I feel that I can never repay you. Neil will soon be earning a fine salary and I have this home — a home he can call his when we marry, as we will very soon now. This, of course, is Marion's home, also, and yours too."

"But when Mr. Dare comes he will not like it, although he is too much of a gentleman to let me see that I am in the way."

"Don't you know, dear, that he is so glad to get me back, as he puts it, that he will be the last one to listen to your leaving Lake City, or here, where you are ever welcome. He says your coming made him one of the happiest of men. Naturally it is very foolish in him to think he is so supremely happy, because I am to be his wife, but he is, and he says that he is personally indebted to you to such an extent that he can

never pay you. So you see that settles the Dare side of the case."

"That is very lovely of both of you, and you cannot know how a deserted wife, deserted among strangers, but the dearest, most splendid strangers a lonely woman ever met, appreciates your nobility as well as generosity.

"I was more among strangers in New York than here, I must admit, more lonely there than here, quite as much deserted there as here, and while I appreciate in every way possible the beauty of your friendship, I feel that I am not one of you. You spoke of what Mr. Drake and I did for you — he did much — I very little. He found me almost destitute and promised me shelter, friends and employment. I have had all in abundance except the latter. I do not want to bother him, in fact, I will not, but I wish he might do something in the way of employment. There is one thing I will mention to no one but you, Norma. I told him in New York that my husband offered me \$1000 if I would seek a divorce from him — the reason, of course, you know. He said if I would come with him I should have the thousand whether Mr. Woodward gave it or not. The last time we met he told me that he had a long interview with my husband and he expected to get the money promised me.

"Now, Norma," she continued, "I believe he is such a perfectly honorable man, such a gentleman, that he will come to me one of these days with that money. He will come with it, and he will tell me an untruth. He is rich, I am told, and he and Mr. Vance may fix it up to pay me, and pretend it was Mr. Woodward sent it. You don't know, dear, how I fear they will do that. You know I cannot accept money from either one. If my husband had that much money he would spend it on himself. I expect nothing from him, now that he has lost you. Mr. Vance will need help soon and I will try so hard to please him if he will give me a chance."

"I have reason to think he will give you that chance," replied Norma, "whenever I am willing to let you go. I have not spent half my allowance and when you need money you shall take it from me. I might have lost Neil, but for you, and I wouldn't take a lot of thousands for him, now that I've promised to be his wife. If you desire it, you can fit yourself for a position in Mr. Vance's office, but I'm not ready to let you go."

"Norma, dear," she cried, and in a moment she was sobbing in the girl's arms, "did ever a forlorn creature find such friends.

"Jessie Woodward, never say 'forlorn creature' again in my presence. You are everything that is dear and sweet, and one of these days, when you have forgotten, absolutely forgotten, you will be a beautiful girl again, and there will come to you one of King Arthur's Knights, and here where the roses bloom and the birds sing you will be a gloriously happy woman."

"Norma, do you know what it is to be so happy that you just must cry and cry for pure joy?"

"Yes, when I came back to Neil, and his strong, brave arms were about me, I knew," Norma said.

It was that day or perhaps the next that Drake called upon Wilberton Vance to discuss the situation as it concerned Mrs. Woodward. Drake related the conversation with her in New York. He told how he had promised her a position if she would come, a position where she could earn an honorable living, and where she would be among friends.

"She came," he said, "asking nothing, demanding nothing. She trusted me, she believed in me. It was the simple and beautiful trust of a child, and now that the husband has gone without a word to her, it is my duty to see that my promise is made good. As you know, I am as willing as I am able to keep faith, but the question is, how can I do it with-

out offending one as sensible, as sensitive and modest as she. There is one feature I have never mentioned even to you. She showed me a letter from Flood offering her a thousand dollars if she would secure a divorce that he might be free to marry Norma. I told her frankly that if she should come with me and save this girl, I would see that she got this thousand. Since she has learned to know us, since she has become so devoted to Norma, she would be offended if she should learn that the thousand came from me. The question now is, what can I do? There is a promise. I made it in good faith. When she tacitly accepted the offer, she believed she would get it, because I could see she believed in me. Some way I feel that she would not look kindly upon my offer to make my promise good."

"You don't propose to take it upon yourself, do you Drake, to do this for Norma and leave me out — I, her friend and guardian? No, I must have a part in this."

"There is one part of my promise you can make good. You will soon need an increased office force, Vance, will you not offer her a place?"

"I had hoped she might ask me — I felt a diffidence in offering her a clerkship."

"Then you will make a place for her?"

"Most assuredly."

"I am grateful, Vance - I thank you sincerely."

"Why are you grateful? I am sure I should be most interested," and Vance did not let the searching eyes of the young attorney see the twinkle in his own.

"Grateful because I see a promise fulfilled. Grateful because I should have offered her a place in my office — a position she might have felt a delicacy in accepting," replied Drake, with dignity.

"Suppose we see the doctor about that thousand dollar promise. If that is ever paid to her he will want to do his share. His undying affection for the memory of his old Captain, Norma's grandfather, would cause him to feel hurt if he were not consulted. Let us think this over and talk to him about it."

As Dr. Harley was a daily visitor at Vance's office, upon some pretext or another, or without pretext, it was not a startling thing that he happened in while Vance and Drake were discussing the affairs of Mrs. Woodward.

"We were talking about you, doctor," said Vance.

"Thank you, gentlemen, and more especially that neither of you alluded to that adage whose edge is blunted and nicked by the years — I need not quote it."

"The old saw is as infirm as it is aged," remarked Drake, "but your name was mentioned by Mr. Vance in connection with a matter we were discussing. With your permission I'll review the case briefly. When Drake had concluded the doctor said: "I am glad you mentioned the matter, gentlemen. If that promise of yours is made good, and it should be, I want in on the ground floor, as they put it in financial circles. Here is my plan; let me give her a cheque, and you repay me each one his share, permitting me to give one-half. I can understand how a young man like Drake would feel embarrassed, but coming from an old fellow like me, it is different. I believe I can make her understand that we, friends of Norma, consider ourselves in her debt yet, and when I come to think of it, neither one of you should pay any part of These granddaughters of Elisha Lane are all I have on earth, and when I do that it will be only a part of my obligation."

"What would you have done with that obligation, as you call it, beautiful and sentimental as it is — if it was not for that farm and the oil on it?" asked Vance.

"I could only sit about and look on with an aching heart. That is all I could have done a few short weeks ago, but now I have it and can spend it as I wish. What do you say, gentlemen? Let me run down there while you wait. I'll offer it anyway."

He was away before they could reply, and while he was gone *The Evening Telegram* was delivered at the office. Drake turned its pages indifferently. He glanced casually at the headlines announcing a railway wreck near a small town in New Jersey. He sketched the account hurriedly, until he came to the list of the injured and dead.

"Vance," he cried, "you were truly a prophet when you said to Neil at the Casino: 'Stop, vengeance is mine, saith the Lord."

"What is it?" asked Vance, interested at once.

"Among those hurt beyond chance of recovery," he read, "is a representative of a New York financial company, Kennedy Woodward—"

At that moment the doctor returned, exclaiming: "It is useless, gentlemen, she will not listen to me — she absolutely refuses."

"The matter is settled, doctor; read that," said Drake. "I'm going East tonight — I may be in time," and Drake abruptly left.

"Well, well," and the veteran of many battles sat staring at the paper. "Abe Thomas would say it was the hand of Providence."

"And what do you say?" asked Vance.

"I would say it was an accident, providential or otherwise, that answered the ends of justice. I think I can see, also, that if she had taken my cheque, it would have been paid back one of these days."

"Vance nodded assent, and smiled, absently. "We had best not tell her," he said.

"No, Drake will tell her all about it when he comes back."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR.

families in Lake City, there was more than the usual amount of gossip concerning the prospective weddings. The society columns of the local newspapers announced the return of Jean Vance from

Darby Center, where she had been visiting Miss Eleanor Clay, who had been the guest of Miss Vance earlier in the season. Jean had not sought to keep the approaching nuptials a secret, and this added to the gossip common to such occasions, but the status of affairs between Neil and Norma were not less discussed because less was publicly known.

Naturally the marriage of the daughter of the man at the head of the long desired railway, the Lake City and Southeastern, to the well-known young newspaper man would attract more attention than the wedding of Mr. Vance's chief clerk to his ward, Norma Lane. Neil had said: "We need not wait, Norma, I will not be quite content until you are mine by solemn vows, as well as promise." But Norma, remembering the short time that had elapsed since some of her girl friends had shunned her, argued that they wait until after Harold and Jean had married. It was only in the exclusive set, as some were pleased to designate that portion of Lake City's society, in which Jean Vance was an acknowledged leader, that the gossip concerning Norma, was current. That it was as a story well forgotten was largely due to Jean. Impulsive ever, she was as free to praise as she was prompt to blame.

While Jean and Norma were never seen together, and in fact had never spoken since that June evening when Jean had so cuttingly cried: "Good evening, Miss Lane," it was Jean who silenced all comment reflecting upon Norma, by those who were ever willing to be dominated by the daughter of the magnate, Wilberton Vance.

Neil had heard of this, and was quick to convey the same to Norma. He observed that his betrothed received the information without comment.

"I wish it were possible and you and Jean were friends as in the past," he said, "now that she is as prompt to do you justice as she was to censure. Harold and I are comrades. Her father is my great, good friend, and he is your guardian and unquestioned friend."

"My unquestioned friend, yes; you have said it, and if it was anyone but the daughter of that friend I could have let the insult pass more easily. You are the only one, my dear, generous boy, who had reason to complain, but let us not refer to that. I prefer to forget, if I can, just as one tries to forget an ugly dream."

Neil knew that time would heal the wound, and did not refer to it again until Norma received Jean's note. Harold had hinted to Jean, that as she had given the offense — but diplomatically made excuse for the action — it would be a gracious act on her part to extend such symbol of peace as girls could best appreciate and understand.

"Harold, I was wrong, clearly wrong. I know that now, and while I do not think it wise to call upon Norma, I will write to her at once."

When Jean had finished the note, she gave it to Harold to read.

"Dear Miss Lane," it ran, "I want to call you Norma, as in the past, but first, before I attempt a familiar or endearing term, I wish to offer an apology too long delayed.

"It will be of little moment to refer to the closed incident, which I, as much as yourself, will care to forget. I did you a great wrong in thought, but never did I give utterance to my mistaken opinions to others of our set. That I wish most of all that you will believe. I am quite as desirous as Harold that the old relationship may be resumed. My dear father, who was right when I was wrong, wishes it might be.

"The splendid gentleman, so fully trusted, and heartily loved by my father, he who will be your husband, I know is hoping that we shall be friends, and as that is my earnest wish, I remain,

Your friend,

"JEAN VANCE."

"That is splendid of you, my Jean, and she will be happy to receive it, I'm sure," Harold said.

It was the next day that Jean read with deep interest Norma's reply. The introductory was quite as formal as was Jean's, and while less generous, as was to be expected, was frank and gracious.

"Previous to receiving your kind note," it read, "it was my purpose, had we met face to face, to speak to you as you did to me. It was to be 'Good evening, Miss Vance,' but your communication prevents that. The reference in it to your father appeals to me. I remember my father; I love and revere his memory, and remembering how devoted these men—your father and mine—were to each other, I feel free to tell you, that Wilberton Vance's own daughter loves him little more than I, and knowing his wishes, I would deserve little of his regard if I did not receive your note in the spirit in which it was meant.

"I must say, Jean, that the wound smarts yet. I confess freely my foolish, aye more than foolish — my wicked neglect of Neil, but I felt that you who knew me as well as any of our set and sex should not have believed me so lost to decency

that I would forget what the daughter of Henry S. Lane owed, not only to her friends, but to herself.

"Nothing in your note was so healing to the old wound, as your reference to Neil. I truly rejoice that Mr. Brady and you will be happy as husband and wife, and I believe you will wish my own loyal Neil as great a measure of happiness, even though he has bestowed his affections upon one as undeserving as myself.

"Time will heal the smart, and the world need not know that once we were bitter enemies, and for the sake of the men we love let us so conduct ourselves that no shadow of suspicion that all is not right betwen us, may fall upon them, because of an incident in our lives—an incident that you say, is closed.

"With friendly regard,

"I am yours,

"NORMA LANE."

"For the sake of the men we love—" Neil read this line aloud, and re-read it. The girl sitting close beside him blushed at the reading, but rejoiced as she saw the wealth of love and tenderness in his eyes.

"Have you made a copy of this, Norma?" he asked.

"Why should I care to keep a copy?"

"In the first place, it is an important communication, and you should retain a copy. In the second place, it is very beautiful and precious to me," said Neil, "so much so, that I want a copy, and together we will keep it so that if we should find ourselves on the verge of a quarrel sometime—and Norma, dear, we are only human—we shall seek that letter to Jean Vance, and as we read it again we can recall only the tenderer episodes of our lives, and put in the heart's wastebasket all that we care to forget."

Jessie Woodward read it also, and commended the sentiment and dignity of the note. She was pleased that there was a prospect of peace between the young ladies — a peace that would be a source of happiness to Neil and Harold.

Neil had not told Norma of the railway accident, and by some strange chance, the local newspaper containing the account was not read by either Norma or Mrs. Woodward. Thus it was that she was not aware of the hurried eastern trip taken by John Adams Drake, or the fate that had overtaken her husband.

When she had refused the cheque offered by Dr. Harley, she anticipated a call from Mr. Drake, or some reference being made by Mr. Vance to her refusal, but Vance had made no comment, and Mr. Drake had not put in an appearance.

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

Before Drake reached the village near the scene of the accident, all the wounded were removed. He found Woodward in the village, and when the surgeon in attendance refused him admittance he felt that his journey had been in vain. He learned, however, that while recovery was hopeless, Flood might live several days. All that science could suggest was being done for the sufferer. Drake asked for an interview with the surgeon, which request was acceded to.

"Are you a friend of the injured man?" asked the surgeon, somewhat impatiently.

"To be frank with you, I am not, but with death impending I do not feel that I am his enemy. I represent one who would be at his side now if he had not deserted her. You understand, I presume, that I refer to his wife. So far as I know she is ignorant of his condition, although friends may have told her. If you can assure me that there is a chance that he may live, and my seeing him would lessen that chance, I do not ask admittance, but if not, there are reasons why I should be permitted to speak to him."

"If he wishes to see you, I will not interfere. I am here by orders of the company. I am one of the surgeons in the employ of the railroad, and it is my duty to do all I can to save his life. You are a lawyer, are you not?"

"I am. I am not here, however, in a professional capacity," answered Drake.

"I was about to suggest, if you are, there will be time enough to bring action when he dies."

"If I can see him, it may prevent that which you seem to fear."

"Who shall I say waits to see him?"

"It might startle him less if I accompanied you — if we went quietly to him, without announcement. I will obey your orders implicitly, however," was Drake's reply.

"Some one to see you, Flood," said the surgeon.

Flood slowly turned toward the man who waited silently for recognition. At first the victim of the railway disaster failed to recognize the visitor. The light had almost gone from the flashing eyes that had wrought havoc with heart of woman.

"What do you want?" he asked, feebly.

"I came to see if there was anything I could do for you?" replied Drake.

"Nothing," said the injured man.

"Do you wish to see your wife?"

"It is too late now."

"I'll telegraph her if you wish."

"Would she come, do you think?"

"I am sure she would."

"Does she know I am hurt?"

"That I do not know. I read the account of the accident yesterday. I came at once. It was thought best not to tell her until I came; then, if you wished, Mr. Vance would urge her to come at once."

"She had better not come. I'll soon be out of the way. I have nothing against you. I hope you will be better to her than I've been."

"I am not here to cause you distress. Please say nothing further on that subject. She will soon go to work for Mr. Vance. That is the arrangement. She is among friends who will not see her want for anything. I came to see if there was anything I could do for you such as she might care to have me do, or do hereself if she were here. Then I felt that you might have some message for her, or care to make some provision for her."

"Doctor, I want to talk to this man alone. You've done your duty. It might save trouble if you sent for the railroad's attorney. I may be worth more to her dead than I was alive. Fix it up between you." A great wave of pain swept over him and he could not suppress his moans. He grew easier presently, and the doctor withdrew. "I suppose you know about that thousand dollars I promised."

"Yes, I know," Drake answered, gently.

"But I did not get the girl."

"This is not the hour to remember that."

"What do you want me to do?"

"You suggested just now that the Company might settle with her. I have no authority to speak for her. I know not what she would say if she knew the situation. I wish to tell you what she said when I met her in New York."

When Drake had told all that was said about his offer of \$1,000 Flood nodded feebly. "They will pay more than that," he said.

"Is it your wish that she shall get whatever the Company will pay?"

"Yes," he said. "Drake, will you do something for a fellow that can't do anything any more?"

"Anything honorable that I can do."

"It is most too late to do anything dishonorable on my part, ain't it?"

"What can I do?" Drake asked.

"The Syndicate owes me \$500.00. That will bury me, and pay a few bills that may come in. I owe some in Lake City. Make the Syndicate pay me. I'll sign the paper you will write for me. The surgeon will witness it. Fix things quick now—these pains will finish me."

The attorney for the railway was in the village looking after the interests of his Company. He and Drake met, and the matter was easily adjusted. When it was explained to Flood, he seemed pleased that he was able at the end of his career to do something for the wife he had wronged and neglected. He was able to sign his name to the papers prepared by Drake, relating to his affairs for the Company which employed him.

When the lawyer was about to leave for New York to get his money, Flood having given directions for its disbursement. Drake said: "I'll see you when I get back."

"Yes, you'll see me, but I won't have a word to say."

When Drake returned the undertaker had completed his work. He at once wired Norma Lane

"Kennedy Woodward died this morning at 5 o'clock. (Signed.) "JOHN ADAMS DRAKE."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE.



T was an eventful year that followed the first appearance in Lake City of Kennedy Woodward. What happened during that year has been recorded, except certain events that were as happy as they were interesting.

While the cars on the Lake City and Southeastern could have been put in use at least a week earlier, it was Vance's purpose to make the formal opening of the road to the public on the anniversary of Flood's first visit to his office. He who sought to wreck the fond hopes of Lake City's first citizen, had gone from earth, but Vance could never forget the anxious hours that followed the coming of this stranger. Those anxious hours had passed.

During that year he had learned to know his friends. There were those who were lukewarm, who should have been interested, but all this was forgotten when the first car with Mark Singleton, as conductor, swung around the curve by the Casino and disappeared in the distance along the lake shore. Mark was to begin his work as conductor, and if necessary, serve as motorman.

This was to be the beginning, for it was Vance's intention to promote him until he became assistant manager and have general charge of the men operating the passenger department. Neil Dare was the acting superintendent. Naturally, Mr. Vance, the president of the company, was the general superintendent as well.

Mr. Vance's private coach followed the first car, which was crowded to its utmost when it left Lake City, and at each

stop many were waiting. At Eden, where the first stop was made, more than a hundred enthusiastic villagers and country folk sought an opportunity to enjoy their first trolley ride.

Mark announced to the disappointed crowd that Mr. Vance would soon arrive and explain what provision he had made for his friends at Eden. He thought it best to telephone head-quarters and explain the situation. He found that Vance and his party were about to start.

"Tell our friends in Eden," Vance said, "that I will see them when I get there and make provision for them."

While Mark's car was crowded, as has been said, and he had refused many, he made one exception. He was approaching a farm that even from a distance he recognized, and for a moment — a fleeting moment — thought how he might have revenge for a most unpleasant experience. He was wondering if Isaac Leedy, the man with the horse whip, the strenuous defender of Doctor Harley, would be waiting to take the car.

In front of Leedy's house was a sign that showed a stopping place. Mark, from the rear platform, observed the barnyard where he and Leedy had their brief dispute. The motorman, obeying orders, slowed down, but did not stop unless ordered by signal. Mark recognized the farmer who gave a signal which the motorman was about to ignore. Conductor Singleton gave the sharp, imperative order that was acted upon promptly, and the car stopped.

Now was his opportunity to show his authority. No one could say that he had not the right to refuse to take the farmer and his wife aboard. He could have said: "The car is full, sir, stand aside."

As quickly as the temptation came it passed, and there flashed the more generous impulse, as Mark cried: "There is nothing but standing room, Mr. Leedy, and mighty little of that. Swing on, if you wish to."

Mr. and Mrs. Leedy were quickly jammed in with the other passengers. Mark proved to be a model conductor — perhaps the only one of his kind — for an ungainly, loud-voiced sort of hoodlum who had been annoying all that sat near him was surprised to find himself standing in the crowded aisle. It came about in this manner: "Here, get up quick," the conductor was looking fixedly into the eyes of the big fellow, who, without pausing to ask why, arose.

"Take this seat, Mrs. Leedy," said Mark, and as she, much surprised, took the vacated seat, Mark pleasantly expressed his thanks to the big fellow who was debating whether to get angry or laugh it off.

Leedy, who had observed the occurrence, exclaimed: "I'll swan to man, it's the fellow I horsewhipped."

When Mark, resuming his place on the platform, smiled at the farmer, that sturdy yeoman reached his hand, saying: "I didn't know you at first. Thank you for getting my wife a seat."

"I told you I'd get even with you sometime."

"Well, by Heck, you did. How does it happen you're here?"

"It is too long a story to tell now. Sometime I'll tell you all about it. I want to say, though, that you don't like that old friend of yours, the doctor, any better than I do."

"You don't say." Leedy was dumb with surprise. After a time he said in softened tones: "Some day, when you got a bit of time, bring old doc out an' both of you stop off to dinner."

In Vance's coach, including the president and his wife, were his daughter, Mrs. Harold Brady and husband, as Jean would have it; Aunt Louise Clay, who came all the way from Darby Center to have part in the occasion, and visit her beloved niece and nephew, "Wilbert," as she called him; Doctor Harley, Marion Lane, Neil Dare and Norma Lane. Foxhall

Standhope was one of the party, but when Mark's message came and Neil was about to leave them that one in authority might remain on duty, Standhope demurred.

"I will be general manager today," he said. "There is little use in me going now; there will be time enough later. This is your day, Neil, and a certain young lady will be sadly disappointed if the acting manager is not along."

"Standhope is right; Neil, come on — all aboard," shouted Vance, and the men who had been most faithful to the project, and the ladies whose interest and enthusiasm was little less than these who had planned and executed this oft-wished for undertaking, were off for a joyous ride over the new road.

At Dr. Harley's suggestion a car was ordered to follow in twenty minutes, the doors of which were not to be opened until it reached Eden.

"They were faithful there, through it all," he said, "and if any special favors are shown, let Eden be the exception."

"If your friends, or our friends, rather, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas, are waiting to go, they will find room in this car," said Vance.

"There is nothing you could have suggested, my friend, that shall make me forget the years — make me feel that I am a boy again — as your offer for a place here for Abe and his wife."

Far back in the shifting, struggling mass of villagers Neil espied the farmer and his wife. They had evidently planned to make a day of it, if the basket Abe was bending under could be considered proof. He made his way toward them with difficulty, and while Vance was telling how a special car was coming that would have no passengers until his friends in Eden were accommodated, Neil and Abe struggled through the crowd with the heavy basket.

Mrs. Thomas had scarce entered the car when the doctor shouted: "Have you any of those little biscuits, Malinda?"

"Dozens of them, doctor, and peach preserves for spread," she answered.

"Glory be-" he cried.

"If that man is ever converted the Lord will have to stuff him first," said Aunt Louise.

The doctor found an opportunity later to reply. The young people had sung all the happy songs they knew, and these songs were hushed only when Mrs. Thomas began emptying the great basket. She was not the only one to remember that food as well as laughter and song was desirable on such an occasion. The doctor had inspected the car, and knowing that the ladies were prepared to serve lunch without convenient tables, had a number of neatly planed boards piled on the rear platform.

When Harold asked whether he anticipated turning the president's coach into an express car, he informed the young man that the president's son-in-law might offer thanks instead of criticism when the hour came to eat.

When Aunt Louise saw these portable tables loaded with tempting viands, she began to sing a hymn in unmelodious tones:

"Marrow and fatness are the food,
His bounteous hand bestows;
Wine on the lees, and well refined,
In rich abundance flows.

"But O! what draughts of bliss unknown,
What dainties shall be given,
When, with the myriads round the throne,
We join the feast of heaven."

The doctor made a wry face as the discordant notes pierced his soul and said: "The Lord must have stuffed some other people before conversion."

Eleanor, who was near him, exclaimed: "Don't be cruel, doctor, poor Aunt is so happy today."

"So was I until your Aunt began that Indian chant."

"Eleanor, is that unregenerate mortal making fun of the hymn I was singing?"

"Oh, you were singing, were you? I wouldn't have suspicioned it. Apropos of that last line of the hymn you sung so — so strangely," continued the doctor with serious face, and laughing eyes — "that 'feast of heaven,' remind me of the old negro woman I told you about once. A neighbor read in a county paper, one winter day, how the thermometer registered ten degrees below zero at Paradise, a village near by. 'I did not suppose it got so cold as that in heaven,' he said, jokingly.

"Ten below zero in heaven? cried the colored woman; um, um, I allus wanted ter go there, too; I done reckon I couldn't go to de odder place des fru de wintah?"

The doctor's smile was reminiscent as he glanced at Miss Clay.

"If that incident ever occurred — and I doubt it — it was Jno. P. Harley who read the paper," she answered, bruskly.

Thus with feasting and fun, with story, song and good humored repartee, with cars crowded all the day with delighted country lads, all the more delighted that the girls, dressed in their Sunday best, were obliged to sit close to them — very close, indeed, all on account of the crowded condition of the car, of course — and thus the Lake City and Southeastern traction line began its successful life. It was a day of rejoicing, not only for the management, but a day of unquestioned joy to all who could find room on the cars.

There had not been an accident, no annoying waits, no unpleasant incidents to mar the day; the only cause of complaint was the lack of cars. Even the disappointed were generous enough to concede that no new road could furnish transportation for such numbers.

Foxhall Standhope received the congratulations of the president and his party for the splendid manner in which he had handled all the details, and for the seeming perfect equipment of the road.

"That which began in gloom has ended gloriously," he said, "and I am proud to have had a part in it. Never have I felt such interest in a road, or such affection for those connected with it."

"There will always be a place at our firesides, at our tables, and in our hearts," replied Vance. "You came in the midst of the gloom, as you have said, and as you leave us, the sun is shining."

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

It was three months after the auspicious opening of the road that Manager Neil Dare took a vacation. Among all the sons of men who have enjoyed hours of triumph and joy unspeakable, few were more capable of enjoying such triumph, and few have lived, and left earth who deserved more. Men have risen to power and greatness, and all too often these men of power crushed the weaker brother, or trampled upon women's hearts to reach the top. Neil Dare lived the solemn obligation he had taken.

It was noon — high noon they called it — when the organ began the immortal wedding march. The great auditorium of the church was packed. Norma had intended being married at home, where only those who had believed in her through it all would be invited, but this would leave Jean Vance Brady out, and naturally, Harold as well, Neil's devoted friend, and so that idea was abandoned.

"If you want to be Exalted Ruler next year," said many of his lodge friends, half in earnest and half in jest, "you will invite the entire lodge." When Norma heard this, and remembering their loyalty and devotion to her when friends were needed, said:

"Neil, they must come and see us wedded. They want to come and I want them — when I think of papa I think of them — and if he knew he would like me to do this."

The wedding was announced for St. Andrews, and so on this noon of a beautiful September day, they were wed—these who had suffered—but through suffering this hour was made more glorious.

The lodge was seated in a body, and each member looked and peered with more curiosity than men are supposed to possess to see if Norma — beautiful, radiant Norma — wore the necklace they had bought.

Vance was to have given the bride in place of the "absent" one, but gave way when he learned by the merest chance that the doctor had hoped he might have been chosen.

When Vance asked him about it, he said:

"I naturally supposed you would, but you have had your day, when you gave Jean to that boy we all like, but I am alone, you know, these grandchildren of my Captain are all I have and I thought I'd like to stand instead of her father."

"And you shall," Vance answered. "That is, of course, if Norma don't object."

Norma did not object. The tears for a moment dimmed her beautiful eyes, as she put her hand upon his shoulder with all the trust and affection of a daughter. "We want you—Neil and I do—and it will please Marion."

She saw the proud smile that glorified his war-scarred face—saw the smile that lighted his lips die slowly as he looked away from her—off into the blue summer sky where white clouds were floating—and in its place came an expression of peace and love unutterable.

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

"It was near the sundown of that day that the doctor strolled over to the Lane residence to see Marion. "She will feel a bit lonely, poor child," he said to himself, "now that Norma is gone, and Neil.

He heard voices, low toned and tuned in sympathy with his great loving soul, that embraced all of mankind worthy of being loved, and he knew who was talking so low and earnestly to Jessie Woodward.

Presently Marion came and sat where the sinking sun turned each hair into a thread of gold. He glanced at her furtively. The glory and beauty of a young girl that one loves when he is old is blinding.

"Of course, you will be with Norma and Neil, but I've thought you ought to look to me — you ought to consider me in the light of a father — it seems to me I'd be proud to claim you, and when I go away there is my money that will be yours. Some day," continued the doctor, and the pathetic note of which he was unconscious, touched the heart of the young girl strangely. "Some day, you'll go away from me, like Norma went today, and, and, I'll be ready then to report — somewhere — wherever your grandfather is. I'll say 'Present, Captain' — it was an unconscious salute he gave — 'I waited until your grand children were cared for, and then I came away."

"Your devotion to me, doctor," Marion replied, in tones as tender as his had been, "has been such that if I can prevent I won't let you 'report,' as you call it, for many and many a year. You wouldn't want to go away and leave me, would you?"

He did not see the sweet, strange smile upon her lips.

"Great God! no," cried the veteran with uplifted face. There was no irreverence in his cry, it was, indeed, a mighty amen.

She was sitting close beside him — so close that the silken hair the setting sun had glorified was pressed against the old wound — the scar of Gettysburg.

THE END.

